THE COMICS NEWS FANZINE

BEM

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PAUL LEVITZ meets Mike Cruden

DC SCIENCE FICTION COMICS

1980 D.C. COMICS INC.

editor & publisher: Martin Lock
consulting editor: Mike Cruden

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NEWS AT BEM

Somehow, we've managed to fit in two substantial interviews, plus an article, the latest 5-page H.M.S. Conqueror strip, and an extra-long edition of Reaction -- all in forty pages! It makes this issue slightly light on regular columns, but we'll have to make up for that next time --or the time after?

With this issue, we bid farewell to Mike Cruden, with special thanks for his advice and assistance over the last three years. He presided over Reaction for almost half the life of this fanzine, and changed it into perhaps the most interesting lettercol around; his other work for Bem was less obvious, but quite as important -- thanks, Mike. To mark this occasion, we have eight pages of Reaction, with as many of Mike's remarks as possible; and also his interview with Paul Levitz, which he conducted at last year's Comicon. This is, of course, not the last we shall see of Mike in Bem.

Mike Taylor, editor of Masters of Infinity, kindly volunteered to type up the Paul Levitz interview; I hope he can be persuaded to continue to help with the preparation of Bem, if so it will certainly help us to keep to a regular schedule. In two months Bem-31 will be released; it will be a joint issue (as was Bem #8), with

Masters of Infinity as co-star, so Mike will be typing up half the pages; the letter column will be presided over by Dave Harwood, while, to help him get well ahead on H.M.S. Conqueror, a 4-page strip by Mike Taylor & Mike Collins is scheduled. You can expect full rations of Fan-Things, Bemuscene (your reviews should reach me between November 3rd & 7th), Unamerican Activities, Katholicity, Thundermole, and Sigh (or similar), while Elfquest and Fantasy Unlimited will also be featured. I hope it will convince lots of Bem readers to investigate Masters of Infinity further; it's an excellent magazine.

You'll note we are now getting cover reproductions sent to us direct from Marvel, as well as from DC and British publishers; we must be doing something right! You'll also see a different artistic hand at the helm of H.M.S. Conqueror this time -- Stephen Baskerville. And there's a story behind our lead article, and also behind our interview with Marvel Britain's Managing Director, Brian Babani...and I really must thank Joe Staton for the beautiful cover he's given us this time. But, no more room! -Martin

British SF·Fantasy
Art, Strips, Stories

issue four includes contributions from:

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Steve KELLY
Graham LARWOOD
Gary MILLIDGE
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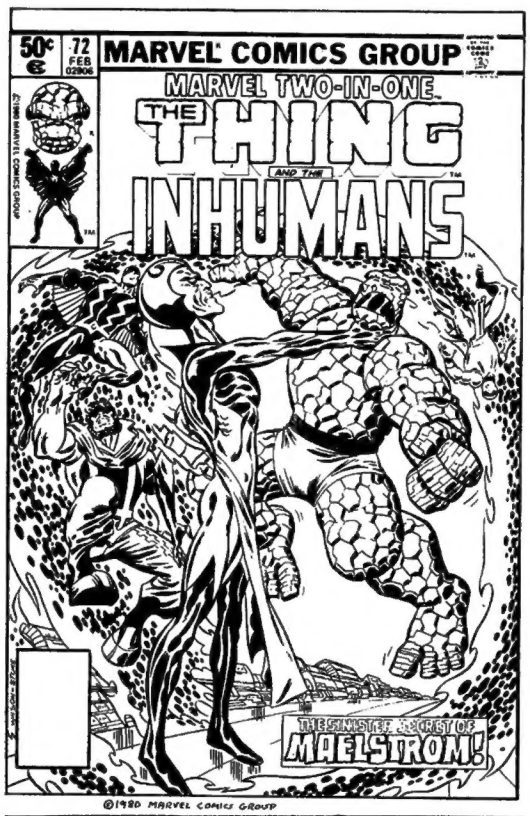
COMICS NEWS

John Byrne has quit the X-MEN; his last issue will be #144. Dave Cockrum will be his replacement; it is not known if Terry Austin will be stating on the book. Contrary to previous published reports, John has never said he would do the oft-talked about X-MEN ALBUM -- in fact, he has been telling people at conventions this past summer he would not be doing it. In any event, John Byrne will be taking over the writing chores on FANTASTIC FOUR with #229 (probably), and is likely to be drawing the book as well. Likely--he does not have the assignment as yet. Sinnott may or may not continue inking, and Austin may or may not follow him. John has already started plotting the FF, starting with a clear break from past issues, so interested collectors who might not have been reading FF lately could jump in. He will of course be writing the 20th Anniversary issue, #236. He continues on CAPTAIN AMERICA.

The "What If Phoenix Hadn't Died" issue of WHAT IF is definitely coming...



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The Benny Hill and James Bond projects mentioned in Bem-29 are now dead; the Prisoner is "up in the air" once again.

MARVEL FANFARE will have 32 pages in the normal format, but with no ads and retailing at 60 cents. The editor is Al Milgrom --stories planned include a Spider-Man/Angel/Ka-Zar team-up by Claremont & Golden, an X-Men story by Claremont & Dave Cockrum, and an Iron Man/Wonder Man/Nighthawk story written by David Michelinie.

MARVEL UNIVERSE, meanwhile, has not yet had its format chosen; originally conceived as a companion magazine to EPIC but featuring Marvel's superheroes, it could appear as a 64-page regular (dollar?) comic, a full colour magazine, or a black & white magazine. At the moment, both the Universe and Fanfare projects are in their early stages, with a backlog of work being prepared before a publication date is set. -TCR/M

DAREDEVIL's first monthly issue is #170; POWER MAN's is #68. Frank Miller will write & draw an upcoming issue of DD, featuring a new villain called Electra. An upcoming issue will feature a back-up called "The Ninja" by Larry Hama and Walt Simonson. -TCR

As of #24, THE HULK! will become a black & white magazine with a colour insert. The Dominic Fortune strip, which runs to #26, will remain in its process colour format. J. Marc DeMatteis will take over the Hulk strip with #26. -TCR

HOWARD THE DUCK will go quarterly with #8. Steve Skeates will take over the writing with #10. -TCR

David Michelinie will leave THE AVENGERS with #205. #203 is the last George Perez issue, which deals with where The Beast and Wonder Man were in #201-202. Don Newton will pencil #204, but no permanent penciller has been chosen. -TCR.

The SUPERMAN/AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #2 treasury will appear in February. Al Milgrom is the editor; John Buscema is penciling and Jim Shooter scripting, with inkers so far including Terry Austin, Bob McLeod, Klaus Janson, Bob Wiacek, Al Milgrom, Bob Layton, and Joe Rubinstein. Future team-ups as they are now planned: #3 -- Batman and the Hulk, co-starring Wonder Woman & Captain America by Len Wein, J.L. Garcia-Lopez & Dick Giordano; #4 -- the X-Men and the Legion of Super-Heroes by Chris Claremont & Dave Cockrum; and #5--the JLA and the Avengers by Roy Thomas & George Perez. As these are planned for a one-issue-per-year schedule, they are subject to change. -TCR/M

The DAREDEVIL "Angel Dust" story which was to appear in issues #167-168 will instead appear in the first COLLECTORS' ALBUM which will appear only in comic shops. Since the book was going to be done without the approval of the Comics Code anyway, they decided to do it in Album form. -TCR

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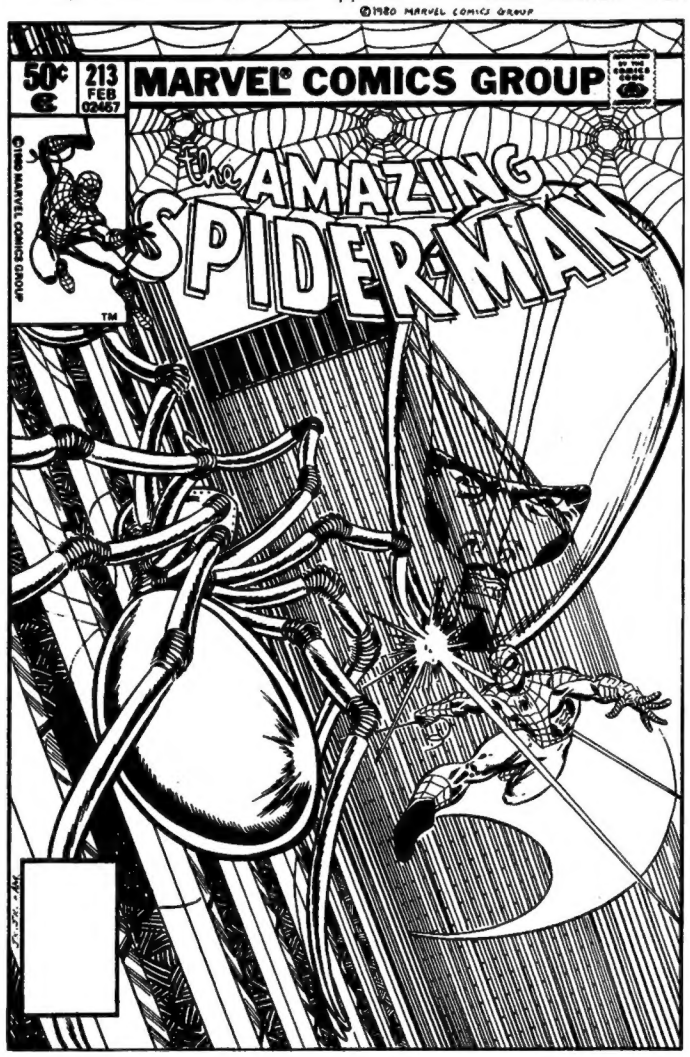
Jim Starlin is doing another album besides his already-planned STARSLAYER book (which ties in with the "Pinocchio In Space" series in EPIC). Reportedly, this will involve the death of Captain Marvel -- for good. This will follow the appearance of a final MARVEL SPOTLIGHT story which will appear in #12, by Peter Gillis and Jerry Bingham. -TCR/M

This year's CONAN ANNUAL has been cancelled. The story meant for it will appear in SAVAGE SWORD. -TCR



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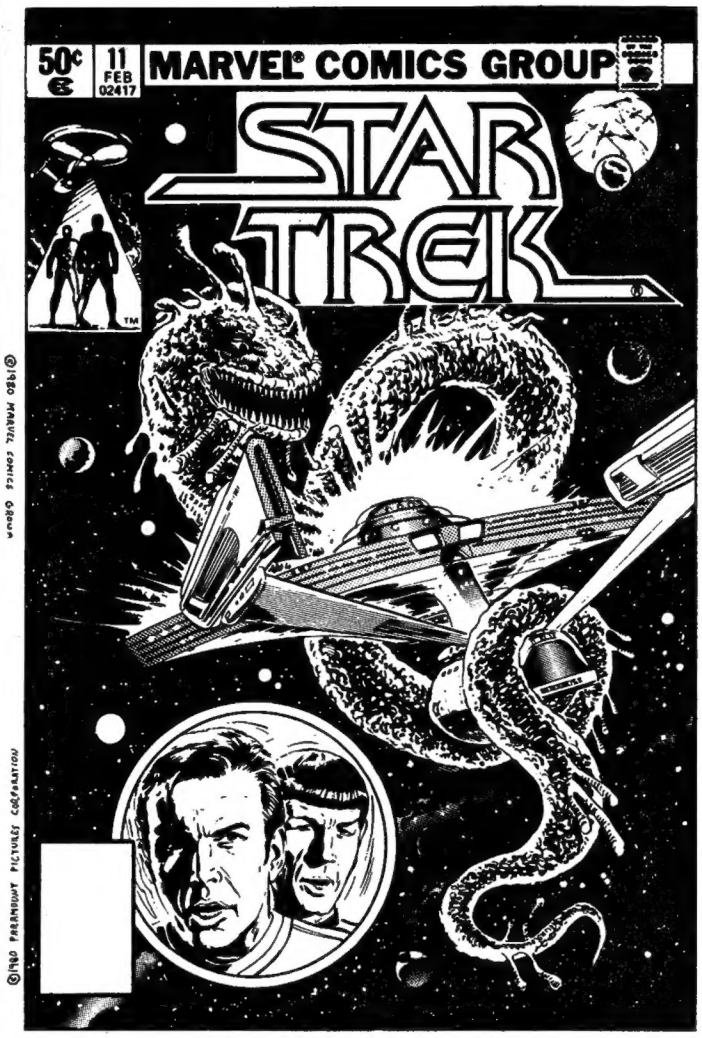
EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES!
the AVENGERS
THE BEAST AND WONDER MAN FACE THE UNENDING MENACE OF THE BROWIERS

THE DAZZLER will appear -- but only in direct sales comic book shops. Since fans go gaga (technical term) for first issues, Marvel will begin a new method of issuing this kind of one-shots: the first issue will have only 250,000 copies printed, all of which will be sold beforehand. Marvel estimates that direct comic shop sales now make up 30% of total sales, and this is their way of saying thanks. There will be further issues, but they will appear as regular newsstand issues, since there aren't too many people who collect second issues. Marvel may do this again with two or three more books.

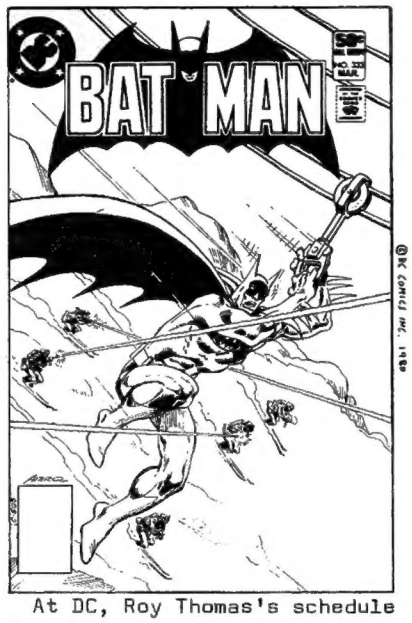
The SUB-MARINER comic is still supposed to appear, you'll be surprised to hear. Jim Shooter still plans to write it, and Al Milgrom is supposed to draw it "as soon as he gets back from vacation." -TCR

Marvel is thinking about issuing a prose novel starring the X-Men under their own imprint. The 1981 Marvel Calendar will be issued by Marvel, with a cover and four months drawn by John Byrne. Jim Salicrup is the editor -TCR

The Dire Wraiths storyline will take a backseat in ROM, as the X-Men guest-star.



The last issues of cancelled titles are: MARVEL'S GREATEST #96, TALES TO ASTONISH #14, FANTASY MASTERPIECES #14, AMAZING ADVENTURES #14, MACHINE MAN #19, FUN AND GAMES #13, and BATTLESTAR GALACTICA #23. MANTHING will continue. KA-ZAR, with Shanna as a featured supporting character, will take BATTLESTAR GALACTICA's place on the schedules. Roger Stern takes over the scripting of DR STRANGE from Chris Claremont with #46. IRON MAN #150 will guest-feature Dr Doom -TCR/M



At DC, Roy Thomas's schedule is filling up. He will jump in with a couple of script-only assignments, from plots already completed, to get the hang of it: he'll script GREEN LANTERN #138 and 139 from Marv Wolfman plots and Joe Staton pencils, and DC COMICS PRESENTS #33 and 34 from Gerry Conway plots and Rich Buckler pencils. The DCCP 2-parter will team Superman and Captain Marvel: one day, Clark Kent dodges into the Daily Planet storeroom and is surprised to discover Captain Marvel's costume underneath his suit, as Billy Batson mysteriously changes into the Man of Steel.

Roy will be doing special 16-page preview issues (like the Teen Titans preview in DCCP 26 and the "Dial H for Hero" one in a forthcoming LEGION) for both his revival of ALL-STAR COMICS and his new, as yet unnamed sword & sorcery title. Len Wein will handle editing on ALL-STAR, which will feature World War II JSA stories, with an expanded cast -- including some Quality and possibly Fawcett heroes, as well as Steel, Gerry Conway's short-lived character. As for the sword and sorcery character, Dick Giordano will be editing and Rich Buckler is likely artist. Rich, we hear, is doing some of his best stuff ever. Of course, we've heard that type of thing before.

Roy's third regular monthly title will be BATMAN, for its new editor, Dick Giordano.

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THE MIGHTY THOR
pollard
THIS IS IT, BOYS!! WASTE 'EM!
IT HAD TO HAPPEN! THOR TACKLES THE COMBINED MIGHT OF BULLDOZER, FILEFRIGHT, WRECKER AND THUNDERBALL---
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DC'S ANOTHER FIRESIDE THRILLER!
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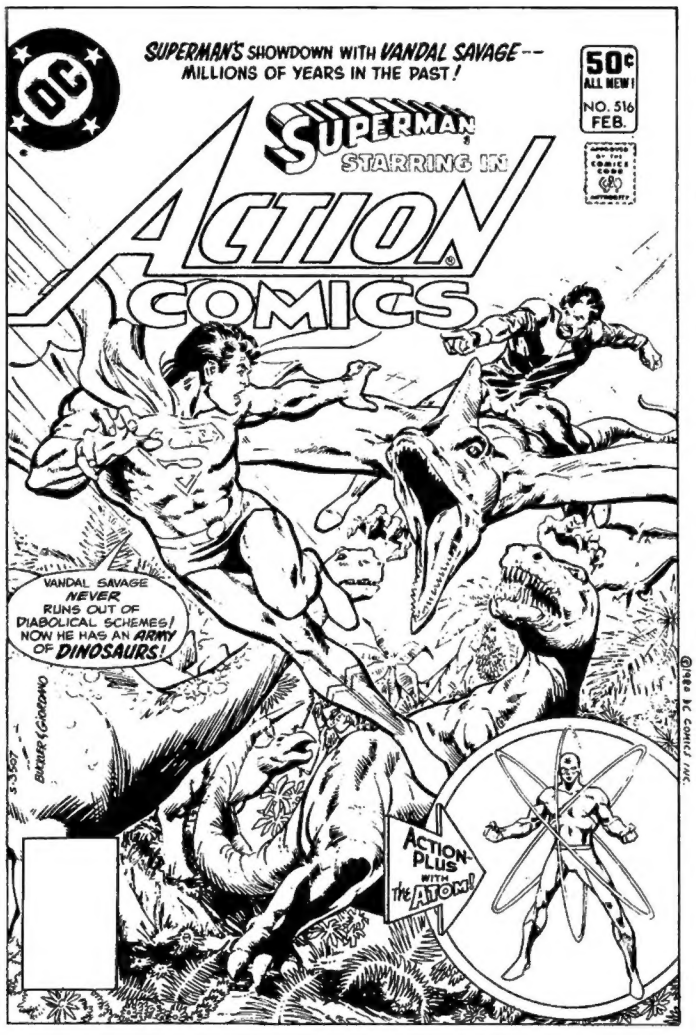
FLASH
I'VE TRIUMPHED AT LAST!
SOLOMAR AND THE FLASH WILL SLAY ONE ANOTHER--- AT THE COMMAND OF GORILLA GRODD!



DC Comics Managing Editor, Joe Orlando, is being promoted to Editorial Director, in recognition of his increased creative responsibility for DC's ventures in book packaging, custom comics, and other areas ranging far beyond the traditional comic book publishing that is the core of DC's business. However, "his management of our editorial team on the comics remains an important part of his contribution", says Jenette Kahn. At the same time, it was announced that Dick Giordano will be joining DC's staff as editor of BATMAN, BRAVE AND BOLD, DETECTIVE COMICS and other projects, effective in October.

Dick Giordano is taking over the creative responsibilities of Editorial Coordinator Paul Levitz, who is being promoted to Manager of Business Affairs, in recognition of his increased responsibilities with respect to special projects, as well as his continuing administrative efforts with the comics.

Due to a misunderstanding between Steve Englehart and DC over payment rates (he thought he had been promised a page rate above DC's normal maximum rate of $32.00 per page), Englehart will not be continuing the MADAME XANADU story in the planned mini-series announced last time. His scheduled Superman/Creeper DC COMICS PRESENTS has also been pulled at his request --although Curt Swan had pencilled the first 7 pages. DC still plans to create a MADAME XANADU miniseries with the already-completed Englehart/Marshall Rogers story as #1, but the writing and art teams of the two new issues have not yet been decided. Editor Jack C. Harris promises, however, that they will bear no relation whatsoever to the returned Englehart scripts.

Englehart has sold the three scripts to Eclipse Enterprises, who will publish the Madame Xanadu two-parter, drawn by Marshall Rogers, with 10 extra pages added by Englehart and suitably modified to avoid infringing DC's copyright on the characters involved, in six 10-page episodes in their new bi-monthly slick magazine, tentatively entitled ECLIPSE, with a price of about $3.00 a copy

A number of further DC mini-series are being worked on. TALES OF THE GREEN LANTERN CORPS will be plotted by Marv Wolfman, and scripted by Len Wein; Jack C. Harris will edit, while famed British artist Brian Bolland is being approached to draw the covers. The issues will be cover-dated May, June & July 1981.

To tie in with SUPERMAN II, mini-series on THE EL FAMILY and THE PHANTOM ZONE are planned; they should come out when the movie appears, which is scheduled for American release in Spring of next year.

Carmine Infantino returns as the regular artist for THE FLASH after a gap of 14 years with issue 296, which teams Flash with the Elongated Man. Bob Smith should be the new inker. Editor Len Wein says that #300 will contain a 25-page story that will feature "everybody"!

Gerry Conway has written a "Space Museum" story for MYSTERY IN SPACE. The old feature's original artist, Carmine Infantino, will be the penciller. Brian Bolland has stories in #115 & #119, while Tom Sutton and George Tuska will also appear soon.

An odd and interesting story: in the late 1940s, DC Comics hired the publisher's nephew, Jay Emmett, as a stockboy and letter column writer. Emmett rose through the ranks, becoming sort of publisher's assistant, and ultimately wound up with a lot of management experience and a lot of DC Comics stock. When Warner Communications bought DC, Emmett found himself owning a lot of Warner stock and rising up through the ranks rather quickly, becoming Executive Vice-President and, now, a member of the company's three-man Office of the President.

Emmett was recently indicted by a U.S. Federal Grand Jury on charges of accepting $70,000 in bribes "for inducing Warner to buy 40,000 shares of Westchester Premier Theatre..." a live-act theatre in New York State that was supposedly Mafia-connected; the theatre went out of business in 1978.

Jay Emmett, as a member of the Office of the President, was the man behind the 1978 DC Implosion. Oh, yes...it was Emmett's name that provided the inspiration for the name of the police commissioner who knew the true identities of Hawkman and Hawkgirl. Oddly enough, two years after the Implosion, DC has hired more than the number of people they fired under Emmett's orders, and restored the pages Emmett cut out (and at the same price), and is once again launching lots of new titles --so it goes.

Len Wein is working on two Bat Lash stories that will appear in the back-up slot in JONAH HEX; Dan Spiegle is slated to pencil & ink them. It has not yet been decided whether Bat Lash will continue as a regular feature.

Paul Levitz & Jim Starlin team up for a 25-page story for DC COMICS PRESENTS, in which Superman learns "Whatever Happened to Starman?" --the Levitz/Ditko hero... Jim Starlin is also plotting another Superman team-up for DCCP which will guest-star Hawkgirl; Roy Thomas will be the scripter. Jim Starlin is pencilling the Firestorm strips for FLASH 294-296.

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THE WORLD'S FINEST TEAM MEETS THE CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN
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Starro the Conqueror, the first villain battled by the JLA, returns in JLA #189 for the first time since #1. Brian Bolland drew a JLA cover featuring Starro as a sample art job. Editor Wein was so taken by it that he instructed Gerry Conway to write a tale based on Brian's art, which will appear as the cover of #190. Brian has also done the cover for #189. JLA 287-288 will have fill-in art jobs by Don Heck and (half of #288) Rich Buckler. #287 will feature a new costume for Zatanna. Rich Buckler will also draw issues 188-190, and lots of DC covers.

The "true, real, honest-to-God" origin of THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER appears in 248-249. The back-up in #249 is the first Mlle Marie solo story for 20 years; #250 features a 25-page story involving Mlle Marie, Sgt Rock, the Losers, and the Haunted Tank's crew. A 3-part Enemy Ace story by Kanigher & John Severin follows; with #254 the book goes to a 3-story format, with the Blackhawks by Marv Wolfman & Dave Cockrum, and Captain Fear, to be drawn by Walt Simonson.

Polygram Pictures, producers of the upcoming Batman film, have announced that Warner Brothers has signed for the distribution rights to the multi-million dollar epic. Producer Michael Uslan says that things are "moving along quickly", and announcements of both the director and the writer of the movie will soon be made.

The Earth-2 Joker will re-appear in an upcoming story of The Huntress in WONDER WOMAN. DC COMICS PRESENTS ≠32 features a super-romance between the Man of Steel and the Amazing Amazon--in the back is "Whatever Happened to... Mark Merlin and Prince Ra-Man", scripted by Mike Tiefenbacher and pencilled by Alex Saviuk. ≠33's back-up is "Whatever Happened to Star Hawkins", the space detective, again scripted by Mike.

BRAVE & BOLD ≠173 & 174 team Batman with Green Lantern and the Green Lantern Corps. The Guardians of the Universe will also be featured; Jim Aparo will draw. ≠175 has as Batman's co-star--for the first time -- scripted by Paul Kupperberg -- would you believe, Lois Lane? Martin Pasko is scripting an issue guest-starring Swamp Thing.

Jim Starlin has drawn the cover for DETECTIVE ≠503, depicting Batman, Robin and Batgirl. Inspired by this, Gerry Conway has scripted a 25-page teaming of this trio of characters for the issue.

We are sad to announce the death recently of Whitney Ellsworth at the age of 71. He was editorial director of DC from 1939 to 1953, leaving the post to become producer of the Superman TV show. He retired from DC in 1970; he scripted the Superman newspaper strip during World War II, and the Batman strip from 1966 to 1970.

Producer Milton Subotsky's new anthology horror film, "The Monster Club", will be released in March/April 1981. This is the film for which Dez Skinn produced a special promotional comic book, drawn by John Bolton (although the second and third stories have swapped places in the film); besides such stars as Vincent Price, Simon Ward, Anthony Valentine, and Donald Pleasance, rock stars are also featured -- B.A. Robertson, Night, the Viewers, and the newly re-formed Pretty Things, with haunting guitar work for the first story by John Williams.

Milton Subotsky's Sword & Sorcery Productions have 11 more projects in preparation, including the stop-frame animation special effects adventure "Thongor In The Valley of Demons", and "King Crab", based on one-time FANTASY UNLIMITED contributor Guy N. Smith's "Night Of the Crabs" novel. An option has been taken on "Solomon Kane", Robert E. Howard's puritan adventurer, and a screenplay is being written; "Another Fine Myth", an SF comedy by Robert Asprin, is at a similar stage. A TV horror series, a TV science fiction anthology series, and a multi-story comedy SF film (without spaceships) based on the "Sex in the 21st Century" anthology edited by Michel Parry & Milton Subotsky are also in preparation.

Marvel Britain are launching two new weekly titles at the end of October; see the cover reproductions on pages 35 and 37, for VALOUR and FUTURE TENSE. They replace STAR WARS WEEKLY, which becomes a monthly with ≠140. DR WHO MONTHLY gains an extra 8 pages for no extra cost with its fourth monthly issue, ≠47.

The pocketbooks out in December, numbered 3 or 9, will be 100-page issues, at 30p, as an experiment. There are also six Winter Specials due, at 40p each. Two are in the traditional 48 pages + covers format, with various superheroes: BLOCKBUSTER and MARVEL SUPER ADVENTURE. The other four have 64 pages, 8 (including covers) in full colour: SPIDER-MAN & HULK, MARVEL TEAM-UP, VALOUR, and OCCULT TALES, which features mystery stories.

Following other companies, Marvel are raising the price of their weeklies from twelve to fourteen pence with the following issues: SPIDER-MAN & HULK ≠398, MARVEL TEAM-UP ≠13, and FORCES IN COMBAT ≠24.

SAVAGE ACTION TALES ≠1 should be out by now. Contrary to previous reports, there is no backlog of unused Night-Raven strips, only one uncompleted story--hence the use of illustrated text stories.

NEAR MYTHS, the Edinburgh-based comics magazine edited by Bryan Talbot, has hit problems; copies of the latest issue took 3½ months to get to America, and incurred storage charges due to a documentation mix-up by the shippers. This also meant that they missed the planned promotional campaign... Because of this, NEAR MYTHS ≠6 has been delayed, and is unlikely to appear before the spring of 1981. It should, however, be a double issue, completing all the serial strips except Luther Arkwright, which of course continues. Publisher Rob King has this message for subscribers: he is very grateful for your support, and promises that all subscribers will get a good deal for their money. People who subscribed when the cover price was 45p are getting a good deal already, as issue 5 had a cover price of 85p!

After script robot John Howard's fall from grace in the Ezquerra-drawn story in 2000AD prog 181, which has him creating a Dredd story in Wembley Stadium (the panels that appear on the screen are by Brian Bolland, and tie in with the 8-page colour story he's drawing for 2000AD's 1982 Annual), T.B. Grover takes over Dredd scripting chores.

Prog 183's Dredd story is in fact scripted by Alan Grant & Kelvin Gosnell, consulting John Wagner; following is a 2-parter, "Monkey Business in the Charles Darwin Block" by Grover (alias Wagner) & Mike McMahon. Ron Smith drew the following 3-parter, "Otto Sump's Ugly Clinic"; and Ian Gibson is doing a fill-in for prog 190, while Mike McMahon is on holiday.

A new "Judge Death" series is being drawn by Bolland; it should run about five weeks. He has also done the cover for the 1982 2000AD Annual; it's unsure whether there'll be a 1982 Judge Dredd Annual or not. The 1981 one will be available by mail from IPC at £2, as distribution has been poor in some areas.

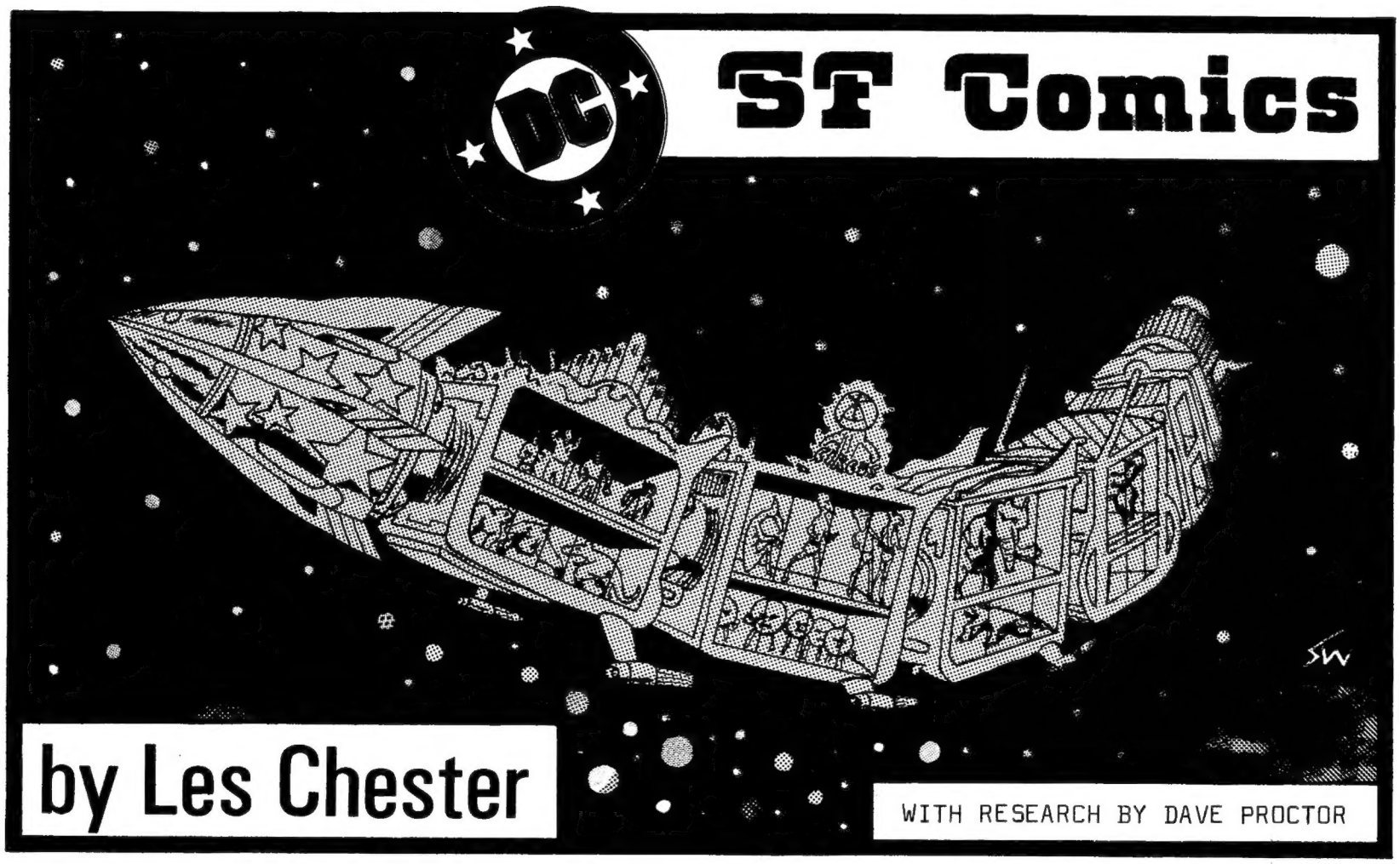
The next "boom issue" will be prog 200. It <u>may</u> see the return of Robo-Hunter; more likely to debut then is an 18-week "Nemesis" series by Pat Mills & Kev O'Neill. Prog 184 has a colour pin-up of his adversary, Torquemada, by Kev O'Neill; it also has a robo-tale by Gary Rice & Ian Gibson, while 183 has one by Rice & Dave Gibbons, with the Melt-down Man cover-featured.

Prog 185 starts "Return to Armageddon", a blend of space and supernatural by Malcolm Shaw & Jesus Redondo.

Next year's 2000AD Annual will contain a Tharg story in colour by Alan Grant & Robin Smith, plus Strontium Dog and a text Blackhawk story.

ART CREDITS

Gary Blatchford: 11; Mark Casto: 28; Hon Fai Chan: 24; Peter S. Darkseid: 22; Ray Hopkins: 28; Wayne Massop: 14, 15; Mike Matthews: 2, 8 (R), 9; Terry M. Moore: 8 (L), 39; Nick Neocleous: 13, 38; Cameron Smith: 31; Joe Staton: front cover; Superswipe: 7, 12 (pencils), colour separations; Kev F. Sutherland: 25; Mike Taylor: 12 (inks).



Some of the most exciting concepts in science fiction over the last 40 years have sprung from the pages of the four-colour comic-book. The original "superhero" who gained a truly world-wide reputation, *Superman*, first caught the imagination of every American with 10 cents in his pocket back in June 1938 in an origin story largely inspired by the fast-moving pulp fiction of the day (most notably *The Shadow* and *Doc Savage*). Shaped by the uniqueness of the times and birthed by men of great vision, the comic-book was altered for all time.

The success of *Superman* inspired the creation of legions of other heroes in tights and capes, usually either the athletic sort such as *Captain America* and *Batman* or magical figures like the *Spectre* and *Dr Fate*. A few depended for their powers on pseudo-scientific gimmicks like anti-gravity rods (*Starman*) or super-strength pills (*Hourman*), and, in the case of the original *Flash*, the inhalation of "heavy water" fumes. Slightly ahead of its time was the *Robotman* series (by the creators of *Superman*) where the hero's brain was transferred from his murdered body into the form of a robot.

The superheroes flourished until the end of the war but then began to lose their appeal, and the comic-book industry began searching for new directions. In the 1950s DC began to introduce a line of mystery and suspense titles (**House of Mystery, Unexpected, House of Secrets**) which featured some science fiction tales with the accent on fiction rather than science fact. Almost simultaneously long-time DC editor Julius Schwarz was striving to keep the two dominant professional interests of his life, science fiction and comics, alive in harmony.

Julie Schwarz was a writer's agent before working at DC, and a roster of his clients reads like an sf Who's Who, with such famous names as Ray Bradbury, Robert Bloch, Edmond Hamilton, Otto Binder, and even H. P. Lovecraft, the king of kings in the weird fiction genre. Many of these writers were later to script comics for Schwarz at DC, most notably Hamilton, Binder and, on one occasion, Robert Bloch.

One of Schwarz's finest books was **Strange Adventures**, which began in 1950 and featured a variety of excellent art and strong short stories. Coincidently, as **Star Wars** created an sf boom in the comics of 1970s, the very first issue of **Strange Adventure** rode on the crest of the wave of newly kindled interest in interplanetary travel. **Strange Adventures** No 1 (Aug/Sept 1950) presented a comics version of George Pal's **Destination Moon**, but the lead story was of an entirely different nature. Space exploration in reality was never (unfortunately) like *The Adventures of Kris KL* 99! Author Edmond Hamilton took the uncertainty of the future, the knowledge of the past and a dash of the fantastic hopes of a young adventurer and wove them together in the person of Kris KL 99, who, with his two partners, Jero the Venusian scientist and Halk the Martian adventurer, roamed the starways in their ship the *Pioneer* in search of new, unexplored worlds. Kris, Halk and Jero were thinking heroes fighting with their minds rather than their muscles, and the brain over brawn approach was the theme of the majority of the **Strange Adventures** series.

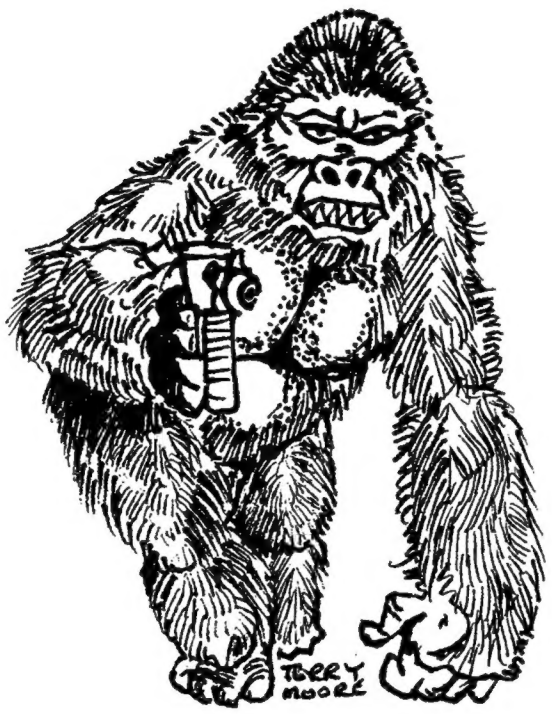
The ultimate thinking man's hero was *Darwin Jones*, who also debuted in that first issue of **Strange Adventures**. Jones was a scientist whose job was to check into strange and unexplained occurences around the world. The eternal sceptic, Jones always looked for a hoax behind the unexplained. But despite his scepticism, the moustachioed hero did his share of quelling alien invasions over the years. *Kris KL* 99 appeared in 8 of the first 15 issues of **Strange Adventures**, but the appearances of *Darwin Jones* were more sporadic—with nine stories over a period of 14 years!

Despite the popularity of the above features, editor Schwarz felt that his readers needed a more 'super' science fiction hero, and consequently the ninth issue of **Strange Adventures** (June 1951) marked the debut of *Captain Comet*, a super-evolved mutant with the mental abilities of a man from 100,000 years in the future. Author John Broome decided that instead of a complicated origin story, he would have *Captain Comet born* with his abilities. With the help of his college teacher, the brilliant Professor Zakro, and his hand-built rocket, the *Cometeer*, *Captain Comet* fought aliens and fantastic, super-scientific menaces all through his series—the longest in the history of **Strange Adventures**.

Never masked, *Captain Comet* somehow retained his secret identity of Adam Blake under the *Clark Kent*-style role of a librarian. His powers were never clearly defined, allowing him to be omnipotent in one issue and easily defeated in the next.

Strange Adventures has been responsible for more than its share of memorable series, and one of the best (alternating every three issues with *The Atomic Knights* and *Star Hawkins*) was the continuing story of the *Space Museum* series. The "frame" involved a museum of galactic wonders in the 25th century, to which Howard Parker would bring his son Tommy. Tommy would ask about a certain exhibit and Dad would

oblingingly spin an 8-page yarn, courtesy of author Gardner F. Fox. The series was essentially a showcase for space adventures, unrelated save for the Museum framing device. Later, Tommy became the ultimate hero of the Parker family when he and two of his Space-Scout friends saved the Earth and rescued the kidnapped *Space Museum* from the "Mass-Energy Robbers of Space".



With the exception of one episode the entire *Space Museum* series was drawn by Carmine Infantino, the artist currently illustrating Marvel's **Star Wars** comic.

Gardner Fox also created the tongue-in-cheek *Star Hawkins* strip, about a bumbling, hard-luck detective of the future. But he wasn't the star of the strip, even though it bore his name. Instead, as with the much later "Laurel and Hardy" team of **Star Wars**—the robot stole the show. But in this case, it was a female robot, in the shape of Hawkins' amazing "girl Friday", *Ilda*, who, though made of metal, had more charm, wit, insight—and brains—than her human boss. It was invariably *Ilda* who solved the latest case her poor boss had undertaken.

The third rotating series in **Strange Adventures** at this time was *The Atomic Knights* (created by John Broome) who first appeared in **Strange Adventures** 117 (June 1960). After the Atomic war of 1986 destroyed most of the civilisation of Earth. Gardner Grayle—an ex-atomic warrior—formed *The Atomic Knights*, named after the ancient armour they wore that somehow shielded them from the lingering radiation of the H-bombs and from "ragun" fire. The six Knights battled mutated plants, devolved men, illusions and various other menaces of their devastated world, including a group of refugees from Atlantis, catapulted into the future by a time warp that occurred with *their* cataclysm centuries ago.

However, **Strange Adventures** did not maintain the monopoly of DC sf heroics. A brace of new sf characters were suggested at the same editorial board meeting that gave birth to DC's first sf book. The characters were *Adam Strange* and *The Space Ranger*. Rick Starr and his space-going alter-ego the *Space Ranger* blasted off on interplanetary adventures under the direction of writer Arnold Drake in **Showcase** 15 (July 1958) and 16 (Sept 1958) and won his own feature in **Tales of the Unexpected** a year later. With his girlfriend Myra Mason and a form-changing alien named Cryll (who pre-dated **Space 1999's** Maya by almost 20 years!), the *Space Ranger* roamed the spaceways, combatting evil in whatever form it might take. Very much in *The Batman* mould with a secret identity and an asteroid hangout bearing no small resemblence to the Batcave, *the Space Ranger* was destined to live out his four-colour life as an "also-ran".

Right on *Space Ranger's* rocket trail was Julius Schwarz's modern-day space adventurer, *Adam Strange* (written by Gardner Fox). Appearing under the title *Adventures on Other Worlds* in **Showcase** 17 (Nov 1958) and 18 (Jan 1959) and his own name in 19 (Mar 1959), Adam went on to be the cover feature and main attraction for 49 issues of DC's **Mystery In Space** title. At that time science fiction was in the period of transition from fantasy to fact, and readers felt that any science fiction story they read today just might be science fact tomorrow. **Showcase** 17's "Secret of the Eternal City" introduced the first arrival of *Adam Strange* on the planet Rann. By becoming caught in the Zeta-beam (originally intended as a communications device but turned into a teleportation beam by space radiation), Adam was instantly transferred, 25 trillion miles from Earth to Rann in the constellation of Alpha Centauri. There was some correlation here to the sword and sorcery hero John Carter, who was teleported to Mars in the novels by Edgar Rice Burroughs, and the strip also contained some of the best elements from *Flash Gordon* and *Buck Rogers*. This first adventure contained all the components that made future *Adam Strange* stories the mini-epics that they were. There was always the suspense of the interception of the Zeta-beam. As scientists are able to predict eclipses so Adam was able to determine exactly where and when each Zeta-beam burst would strike. Since Alpha Centauri can only be viewed from South of Earth's equator, Adam was always in some exotic, faraway place when intercepting the beam. And he invariably had trouble reaching it, once having to tread water when the island he was standing on sank!

Once on Rann, Adam was confronted with the menace of the day. Rann, like Earth, must have had a very strategic location in its star-system, since every alien race within a few light-years' distance was willing to go to war to conquer it! Yet Adam, a thinking-man's hero with only two weapons: A Rann raygun (a simple blaster) and his quick wits, would always remember some obscure scientific fact to defeat Rann's current deadly foe.

His wits were, of course, an illusion that author Fox and editor Schwarz had created. The little scientific fact was thought of first and the then-easily-defeated menace was built around the solution. Notwithstanding that illusion, the *Adam Strange* tales made a welcome change from many of DC's other sf stories, where the most interesting aspect was the apparent willingness of the editors, writers, and artists to totally suspend any known law of science at the drop of a penpoint. An example of that is contained in **Mystery In Space** 42's "Secret of the Skyscraper Spaceship", in which the Empire State

Building was converted into a rocketship to land an army on Mars. That ludicrous premise did however inspire an amazing cover for the comic, and in fact one of the best features of the DC sf books of that period was the beautiful covers which adorned them. In the same way that pulp sf covers featured half-naked women and monsters as their "atention-grabber", DC's sf covers more often than not featured a completely impossible situation which of course persuaded browsers to buy the book to find out how the situation came about. At various times the Earth has been depicted as being locked in a gigantic safe, festooned with a huge scarecrow and shrunk to a diameter of two feet. One particularly hilarious example depicted North America being towed away by a spaceship—even more incredible, the story showed that actually happening!

DC ran many other sf series, varying from the sublime to the ridiculous. *Rip Hunter—Time Master* ran through four issues of **Showcase** and 29 issues of his own title, with extremely well-written (and often superbly drawn) adventures with the heroes meeting and defeating menaces from the past and the future. By direct contrast *Tommy Tomorrow*, a former **Action Comics** and **World's Finest Comics** backup strip, flopped despite five novel-length appearances in **Showcase**. The stories were a little too juvenile, with Tommy carrying a raygun with more settings than Zsa Zsa Gabor has diamonds. It could quite probably make the bed and wash the dishes as well as

zapping every alien this side of **Star Trek**. Speaking of which, one *Tommy Tomorrow* story, "Brain Robbers of Satellite X" had an especially interesting element—a gigantic alien ship in the shape of a bird of prey, which could become invisible. Very reminiscent of the Romulan ship of **Star Trek**, this story ran two years before the show's inception. Maybe Gene Roddenberry is an old comics fan as well as an old sf film fan?

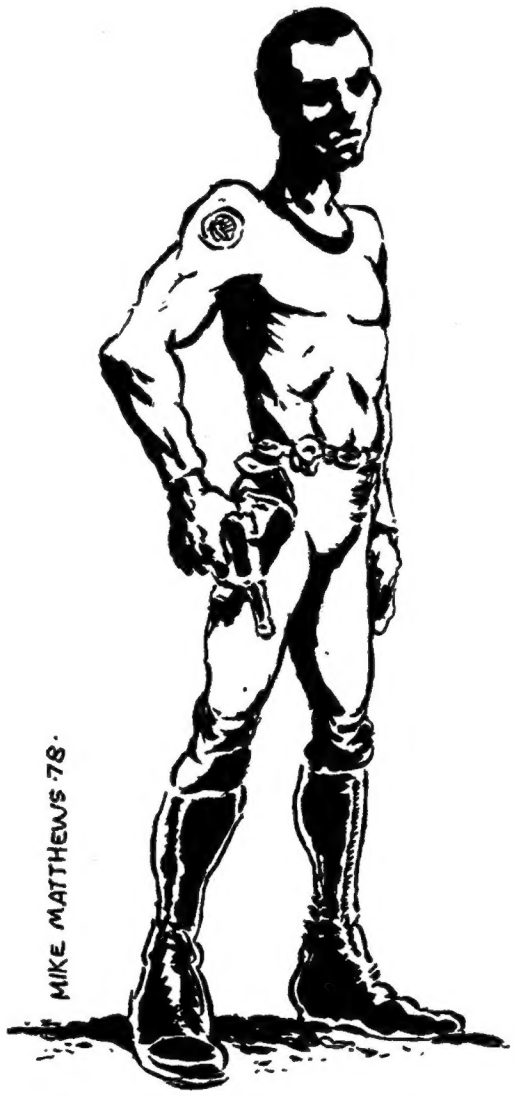
Some other unsuccessful strips were *Immortal Man* and *Animal Man* in **Strange Adventures**, and *Space Cabby* in **Mystery In Space** (written by Otto Binder). *The Space Cabby* series, which ran from 1955 to 1958, was weak on science but full of humour and character, and always beautifully illustrated by Gil Kane. *Immortal Man* and *Animal Man* were very short-lived series which had strong plotlines but came in at a time when the sf boom was on the wane.

The last major series to be launched in the 50s was *J'Onn J'Onzz—Manhunter from Mars*, which first appeared in **Detective Comics** 225. By today's standards, that is a failure-orientated character name—there were at least two previous costumed characters named *Manhunter*, and some bald, half-naked, green alien who hid his presence from the very world he aided isn't exactly the best concept to ever hit the four-colour press.

But in 1955, superheroes weren't a dime a dozen. And the concept of an extra-terrestrial superhero who could fly, see through walls and was faster than a speeding bullet was indeed a *proven* concept. More important, flying saucers were very "in" during the mid-1950s . . . when people weren't out building fallout shelters, they were out sighting UFOs.

Whatever the combination, the *Manhunter from Mars* was the first successful new superhero since the 40s, and in fact the series ran to 102 issues of **Detective Comics**, and a further 31 issues of **House of Mystery**. It should be noted that one unique feature shared by the *Manhunter* and *Superman* was the fact that they were both aliens from other worlds, a concept shared by one of DC's 60s successes, *Hawkman*, who was a policeman from the planet Thanagar. DC's other famous interplanetary policeman is of course *Green Lantern*, whose debut in **Showcase** 22 (May/June 1959) contained the same science fiction trademarks that were in the earlier Schwarz-edited titles, and depicted our hero receiving his ring and battery of power from a dying alien who was but one of the many exotic extra-terrestrials that *Green Lantern* was to meet in the future. The award-winning **Green Lantern** comic has always remained true to its sf roots and is still going strong today.

The 60s marked the appearance of more "earthbound" sf heroes in the changing shapes of DC's chemical heroes, *The Metal Men* and *Metamorpho*. Writer Bob Kanigher's unique *Metal Men* were an instant success in four issues of **Showcase** in 1962 and ran for 41 issues of their own title before disappearing from the news stands. The *Metal Men* were robots with faulty responses who exhibited all the properties of the metals from which they were made (Gold, Platinum, Mercury etc) and the strip was noted for its humour and its vast range of exotic menaces. *Metamorpho*, on the other hand, was a human being who gained the ability to transmute his body into any known element whether gas, solid or liquid, and again his adventures were full of absurd humour.



DC's major contribution to early 70s sf comics came when Jack Kirby joined DC from Marvel Comics. The concepts created by Kirby (later expanded and sharpened by writers like Gerry Conway) were quite brilliant, with the outstanding titles being **Kamandi—Last Boy on Earth**, **The New Gods**, and **Omac—One Man Army Corps.** Kirby's superb artwork and characterisation in these titles made them a joy to read. All the books were linked cleverly around what Kirby called "The Great Disaster", wherein the troops of Apokolips (the villains from **New Gods**) clashed with the gods of Olympus, and few lived past the day when the sky ran blood-red and gods died. Buddy Blank (*Omac*) lived on in a bunker in Manhattan long enough to teach his grandson *Kamandi* (named after "Command D", the bunker in which they lived) the art of survival in a world gone mad. After Buddy's end *Kamandi* went out to face the world: the weird, animal-controlled world of Earth After Disaster. These Kirby titles must rank as some of the most enjoyable in the history of sf comics.

The runaway success of the **Star Wars** movie led to renewed interest in such DC titles as **Superboy and the Legion of Superheroes** (which had for some time been steadily moving towards a straight sf format), and **Warlord**, DC's own version of the concepts in Burroughs' *Pellucidar* series (DC had already chronicled the adventures of ERB's David Innes, John Carter and Carson Napier in the pages of their **Tarzan** and **Weird Worlds** titles some years earlier, albeit not very successfully).

At the same time, DC experimented with new titles such as **Starfire** and **Star Hunters**. **Starfire** was the busty heroine of a kind of sword and sorcery vs science book, which lasted a mere eight issues before biting the dust. *Star Hunters* on the other hand was a superior sf title mixing some of the best parts from *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* with the characterisation which *Star Wars* so sadly lacked. Unfortunately that was one of the books which DC pruned in their recent drastic cutback of titles, leaving the adventures of Donovan Flint and crew literally in mid-air.

Currently DC are only publishing three sf titles (plus the several *Superman* features), but with the upcoming release of *Buck Rogers* and de Laurentiis' *Flash Gordon* (and of course *Superman—The Movie*) there will almost certainly be a renewed market for sf-orientated heroes in the comics. And, who knows? the galaxy may once more resound with the sound of swashes being buckled by *Adam Strange* and DC's other illustrious spacemen.

This article, as you will have gathered, was written a long time ago--in October 1978--and was in fact originally commissioned for Starburst #5. Dez Skinn eventually decided not to print the article, but it wasn't returned to me until earlier this year, and was without a home until Martin agreed to use it. Much water has passed under the bridge in the past two years, and in the movies we've been treated to a succession of SF blockbusters, each seemingly striving to outdo all others in the pyrotechnics department --but with only the occasional literate script among the visual excesses.

DC's commitment to SF continued with the publication of the TIME WARP anthology Dollar Comic, which lasted only 5 issues and probably failed because of the very diversity of the material presented within its pages. Some of the stories were good, some bad, and many clichéd, and the wide range of art styles ensured that the book never had a visual identity. We've also seen the return of Adam Strange, currently to be seen at the back of the GREEN LANTERN comic, but the stories, although good examples of comic-book writing, certainly don't compare with the classics of the Fox era, and the artwork is, at best, indifferent. Or maybe that's just nostalgia speaking...

A more promising debut has been the revived MYSTERY IN SPACE title which, although in the same anthology format as Time Waro, seems to be of a different calibre entirely. So far we've been treated to art from the likes of Joe Kubert, Marshall Rogers & Steve Ditko, with a future contribution promised from England's own Brian Bolland, and there is talk of using the title as a home for some series (for example Star Hunters). The SF boom shows no sign of abating at present, so we may yet see MYSTERY IN SPACE returned to its former glories. Well, I can dream, can't I?

-LES CHESTER

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THE BEM INTERVIEW

PAUL LEVITZ

This interview took place during the 1979 Comicon at the Birmingham Exhibition Centre Hotel. I'm not going to launch into a hard sell about Paul Levitz' achievements; you probably know them already, and the interview will fill in those who don't. Paul is a quiet-spoken person, whom Ian Penman (my co-interviewer) described as the most "together" person he's ever met. In other words, Paul knows exactly what he's doing and is definite and confident about it. The interview stretched over from the final hours of Saturday night to the first hours of Sunday morning, and was punctuated by interruptions from "merry" comic fans and The Search for Glynis Wein. Nevertheless....

Bem; Perhaps it would be useful if you outlined your present duties at DC.
PL; After three years of being what we call "The Editorial Coordinator" at DC, I've finally come up with a job description which I like. Basically we are a very simple company: seven people steer and I push! By that I mean I keep the free-lancers on schedule; I try to keep consistent teams on the same books; I try to make sure that the editors get the artists and writers they want. However, I'm not responsible for the quality of their books; they choose their own teams. If they request a chimpanzee to draw the next issue of their title, I'll happily supply one, if we have one in stock. I try to make it possible for them to do the best books they know how. Since we have a fine crew of editors, we're finally producing a line without any books anyone could feel ashamed of, which is a tremendous improvement over the last three years.
Bem; How many people do you have to keep track of at any one time?
PL; We have close to a hundred free-lancers, plus about thirty-five to fifty people who work for us on a full-time basis, and who comprise the core of the company. We produce about five hundred pages a month of new comics, and there's about three month's worth in production at any given point, so that's about fifteen hundred pages I have to be aware of.
Bem; Could you actually explain the mechanics of that?
PL; I have this funny little red loose-leaf book, which has an inch high line for every issue. So for February, it will list all the February books in the first column. The second column is for all the writers of those books, and when a writer starts a script I enter his name in that column, and when he's finished his script I cross his name out with a big fat black magic marker.
Bem; That doesn't sound a tremendously interesting job.
PL; I regard myself as a juggler, making sure every artist gets the right script to draw at the right time, and trying to ensure that one hundred and seven consecutive issues of a title are by the same artist and writer, because I think consistency matters.
Bem; Have you no ambitions to be a creator yourself?
PL; All of the above is only part of my job. I'm also the editor of all the Batman books, which is creative, in that I'm guiding and steering in order to make the line fit my definition of what the best possible comics should be. After three years I think I'm finally learning to be an editor, and I think the Batman books are showing a good, solid consistency. I'm especially proud of a lot of material you haven't seen yet. We're just hitting our stride on BATMAN, and on BRAVE AND BOLD. I've instituted a rotating writer system which is completely different to anything the book's had before. That's part of the creative aspect. Yet another part of my job is the business end: working with contracts, dealing with our legal department, dealing with our free-lancers, setting up and working on outside deals, and that is also creative, in that it creates interesting new projects for people to fulfil. Yet it's a function which is completely invisible to the comic fans. For example, there's a reprint which is coming out this fall of the Goodwin-Simonson MANHUNTER, in a quality, pseudo-paperback form, by a fan-publisher, and that is a whole new type of field for a comic book house. It involved a whole new style of contract and a whole new approach, which I helped to create, along with Jenette and the people who want to publish it. To me, that constitutes a creative art form, and it's something that I do better than most people in comics, because I have a business background.
Bem; It almost seems that you've arrived at your job accidentally. Even though you entered comics via fandom, there's no fannish equivalent to what you're doing, as opposed to the fan artists who become pro artists, and the fan writers who become pro writers, but there are no parallels at all in the amateur world to what you're doing.
PL; Yes and no. I did edit and publish THE COMIC READER for quite a while, and I ran it as a business and made a profit. TCR also played a part in my ability to do my job because, with it being a newszine, it taught me to remember who was doing what on every book in the business, and it made me aware of the business as a whole. I intended to come into comics to work my way through school, which was the best foreseeable future, since young people didn't get ahead very quickly or very far in comics at that time. That changed dramatically at DC when Jenette came in. My job evolved around my talents. I happened to be a business student, and so knew how to do certain things which very few others in comics knew how to do. I was an interesting combination of business man and creative individual, and my job makes use of that combination.
Bem; It seems to be very much your job, as though it had evolved around you and your talents, although that could be said about many jobs in comics. People seem to slide into editorships, for example, rather than

be specifically trained for them. Is there any sort of training programme?
PL: There used to be, and it's a crime that there isn't one today. Much of the sad state of the business is attributable to incompetent editors. These editors are not incompetent because they're stupid, nor because they're uncreative, nor because they're not trying. They're incompetent because there was noone there to teach them. I spent three years as an assistant editor to Joe Orlando, who is one of the best in the business. Then I became an editor myself, but it still took me another two years before I caught on to what editing is all about and started to put out good comics. Previous to that, I happened to have good people working for me, and they did a good job, and I had enough sense not to muck about and ruin it. Now I can start to put the ingredients of a good comic together myself, even if I don't have the best people in the business to work with to carry it.
Bem; What are the important abilities which an editor should possess?
PL; God knows! Julie Schwartz is a great editor. He wouldn't know a page of art if it bit him on the ankle. Joe Orlando is a great editor, but he learned the English language while he was an editor; he came into the job having hardly written a word. He's still not a writer but he has an infallible instinct; he'll read a script and tell you if something sounds wrong. He can't tell you why it's wrong in terms of grammar or speech pattern; it's simply that it doesn't work. I can't tell you what makes an editor a good editor other than in terms of people who are good editors. Archie Goodwin is a brilliant editor. He gets better work out of people than anyone I've ever seen, but I have no concept of how he does it. He just creates some sort of aura somehow.
Bem; You earlier mentioned incompetent editors. What is it that makes an editor incompetent?
PL: A par level editor is exactly as good as the people working for him. If he has a good writer and a good artist he will produce a good book, simply by not hurting their work. If he's working with a beginning writer and a beginning artist he will produce a beginner's book, which looks and reads like a beginner's book. A good editor will produce a good to great book if he's working with good talent. If he's working with beginners he will teach them, and after two or three issues of a title you'll see them growing. He can somehow take the wrong parts and make the right book out of them. An incompetent editor is one who takes the wrong parts and lets them go their own way, or who takes (in the worst of all possible worlds) good people and makes them do bad work, which takes a great deal of negative skill. Thankfully, there are very, very few people in this business bad enough to make good people do bad work, but I've seen it happen.
Bem: That seems to happen most often when an editor interferes excessively, mainly to justify his own position.
PL: No, it's not as simple as that. I don't like editing in terms of re-writes. I don't think that's an editor's job. The editor makes his presence felt in getting the right people together and creating the right atmosphere and in the plotting stages. Yet Julie Schwartz rewrites mountains of what comes across his desk and produces good books. There is no single set of rules. The only fair way to judge an editor is by his books. If at the end of the day the books come out, and they're entertaining and the work inside is at least on par with what the creators are capable of, then the editor is doing his job. The techniques are all different, but it's the effect that counts.
Bem: I've often wondered about Murray Boltinoff, who, although he had a very professional writer, in Bob Haney, and an excellent artist, in Jim Aparo, produced material in BRAVE AND BOLD which was totally unrelated to the rest of the DC universe.
PL: That was a problem with BRAVE AND BOLD, and it's something I've worked hard to correct. However, Murray is an excellent editor. His job was to sell comics, and in that he has a more consistent track record than anyone else in the business.
Bem: Yet material like the Sons of Superman and Batman is so obviously trash.
PL: I have the same aesthetic objections as you but they are not relevent. Murray's job was to make money for DC. When he took over WORLD'S FINEST it was in bad shape. He put the Sons of Superman and Batman in and the

sales picked up dramatically. I share the same sensibilities as you, but I cannot put Murray down for what he did, because in all his years nobody said that continuity counts.
Bem: DC seem to be making much more of an effort to evolve a consistent DC Universe. Are you directly involved in that?
PL: We all are, partly because we are a generation of people who care more about continuity. Part of it is having the same editor for an allied group of books, the Batman titles for example, which results in greater consistency. It is a good thing because I do think ten year old kids can be confused by concepts like the Super-sons. Even if it sells more copies for the book, it may damage the kids' permanent affection for comics. Murray's techniques are completely alien to me, but they work. I don't understand them, and I can't use them. Occassionally I can analyse his books and learn something important from them which will polish my skills. Nevertheless I have enormous respect for him because for forty years he did his job as well as anyone in the industry, and he met every criteria that people gave him, and that's all you can ask of a man.
Bem: Would the criterion of continuity be imposed on Murray today?
PL: Certainly. That's one of the reasons he's not editing some of his books. He was of retiring age anyway, so it was natural for him to give up some of his titles. Those he relinquished were those in which we wanted to introduce continuity. It wouldn't have been fair to change the rules on Murray after forty years. He sort of sat there and agreed, but scratched his head a bit, because continuity is an alien concept to him. Bob Haney isn't writing BRAVE AND BOLD anymore. I worked with him for a year and a half, and I tried to explain what I wanted. Even though I think Bob is a damned good writer, I had to tell him I was taking him off the book. I couldn't tell him his approach was wrong, because the book was still selling. It was purely a matter of taste. Even though he may have been writing the book since before I was born, the sign on my door says Editor. They hired me to produce the best books I know how, and my rules include continuity.
Bem: Don't you occassionally worry that continuity, which is mainly a fan's preoccupation, may be getting in the way of making money?
PL: Not in my books. I took Haney off BRAVE AND BOLD because I felt that the continuity problems were such that they would affect sales, if not of one Batman book then of the group. I do my job according to my criteria, though you, of course, have every right to criticise what I do after paying your 40¢ for one of my books.
Bem: In that case can I criticise you on a completely different and personal point: the killing of Batman 1 in Justice Society. I could see no particular point for this.
PL: It made a good story.
Bem; Yes, but you must go beyond that. When you consider that he was the character who evolved into the current Batman (and who knows where the original finishes and the current one begins), it seems that you've cut off an entire era.
PL: I can answer that on various levels. First, the era of the original Batman is long gone.
Bem: Except that artists like Marshall Rogers and writers like Steve Englehart recall very much the concept of the original Batman.
PL: But it was still the modern Batman, who operates from the Wayne Foundation, which they were doing; whether it resembled Bob Kane's version is irrelevent. Marshall Rogers could do that strip with or without the continued existance of the original Batman. I have not eliminated the possibility of Marshall doing those stories. What I was eliminating was the possibility of doing stories about a sixty year old Batman. I haven't even eliminated that possibility completely, you've certainly seen enough characters come back from the dead in this business. There are untold stories. There's nothing necessarily permanent about it. I would prefer it to be permanent because I don't think stories about a sixty year old man running around in a Batman costume are particularly interesting.
Bem: Wasn't that resolved by having him retired and working as a police commissioner?
PL: I admit I did like that set-up, but I felt that Bruce Wayne ought to die as the Batman.
Bem: I suppose it's silly, and very juvenile, to resent that death.
PL: No it's not. It's fair enough that you didn't like that story. We got an enormous number of letters professing dislike for that story, but there was also an awful lot of readers who did like it, and we sold a lot of comic books.
Bem: You've also bumped off Kathy Kane, the Batwoman.
PL: The principal reason we killed off Kathy Kane was so that nobody could write her into stories, because we had several people in the office who had brought her back, for some ungodly reason and to no good purpose as far as I, as the editor of the Batman line, could discern. I didn't think she had any point, and could serve no other useful purpose other than giving us an interesting dramatic incident, so I got rid of her. We got a lot of letters about that, which shows an interest being taken in the book. It's important for an editor to make people talk about his books, and people are not bored by the Batman material. They're interested in seeing what's happening, so we're fulfilling our job. Maybe I've succeeded in getting you to read the next issue to see what happens.
Bem: It's just that you've done this several times now. you've killed off the original Cat-woman, the original Batman, and Batwoman.
PL: One of the things that has been wrong with comics for a number of years is that we've gone too far in making it an invulnerable, static world. Comics are more effective if you think there's a possibility of some of the characters dying.
Bem: Except that the people you have killed

off have all been fairly dispensable.
PL: But for years, in many cases, even the dispensable people weren't dispensed with, so there was none of that sort of suspense. Obviously we are not going to kill Batman or Robin, but maybe Alfred will get offed, or maybe Commissioner Gordan can die. These things exist as possibilities, so when the secondary characters are in danger, the danger becomes a touch more realistic and suspenseful. It's an effort to make the comic universe a little more realistic. My philosophy (though that's too pompous a word for it) of writing comics is to attempt a sense of progression. When I was writing Aquaman there was change in the strip. It moved from his being the king to his being deposed to his getting the throne back and renouncing it in the course of the two years or so that I was on the strip. I think that was rational and realistic, and built into you the fact that change could exist in this world. If you do a comic that stays in precisely the same place year after year, it's dull. In the Batman books you'll see things to create movement and change, because I think you have to surprise the reader. I think the reader wants to see something a little bit different every time he picks up a comic, which creates interest.
Bem: How have you gone about choosing the artists for Batman?
PL: It's not entirely my choice. I'm very pleased with the guys I have; within our line of talent I couldn't ask for a better team. I got Irv Novick because Ross Andru dropped him off the Flash, and I felt Irv was a better choice than John Calnan. Jim Aparo has been doing BRAVE AND BOLD for a long time. I put Don Newton on DETECTIVE because I wanted a third artist whose look was consistent with that of the other two. I think it's important that the characters look pretty much the same in all the books; that the feel of the books be similar.
Bem: Is that why Marshall Rogers isn't on Batman anymore?
PL: Marshall dropped the book; he quit. In fact, just before I started editing the book they had been debating whether to make the look consistent with Marshall's, but they just couldn't think of enough people to capture that look, which is why they were using Golden for a while. Marshall quit Batman because he said it was taking too much of his time to produce, so he couldn't make any money. I respect that reason totally. When Marshall dropped the book I was not sad, because I don't think Marshall is the most commercial artist in the world, although I personally enjoy his work. DETECTIVE is selling considerably better now, though there has been a lot of changes, so I can't pin the sales improvement on the change-over from Marshall to Don.
Bem: I suppose that's the reason you refused to allow Marshall to illustrate one of Steve Englehart's stories.
PL: After Marshall dropped DETECTIVE I had Englehart do that fill-in for BATMAN. Steve called Marshall and suggested that he should illustrate it, and Marshall agreed. So when Steve dropped the script off he said that Marshall was going to draw it, and I had to disagree. Irv Novick was drawing BATMAN, and that was the look I wanted and Marshall was off the Batman stuff. I had a consistent look, and I liked it. It would have been okay for a little back feature, but not for the main title, a fill-in for which would have to be consistent with Irv's approach to Batman. Marshall is very talented, but he's not right for it any more. Marshall came in and couldn't understand my stand on the whole thing. But I'm the editor and I believe that consistency counts. When I need a fill-in for Irv I try to get it out of Walt Simonson, who, when inked by Dick Giordano, produces a look which is consistent. Walt has a different story telling approach but his Batman looks the same. He uses a clear sharp story telling style, like Irv's, which any kid can follow, as opposed to Marshall's, which I think is a little obscure.
Bem: But it seems a little retrogressive to go back to Novick.
PL: What's the difference whether it's retrogressive or progressive? I think it's better than the BATMAN book has looked for years. Marshall's stuff didn't sell terribly well.
Bem: It was a wonderful looking comic though.
PL: I agree. I thought it was a delightful comic. I enjoyed reading it. But my business is to make money. DETECTIVE COMICS under Englehart and Rogers sold a lot worse than BATMAN under Reed and Calnan, neither of whom were doing things that interested me half as much as the material by Steve and Marshall.
Bem: I agree it's difficult, but it's been proved that you can succeed with quality by Claremont and Byrne.
PL: I think we're doing it with the Batman books. I think they're a quality line. But there's a difference between quality and personal taste. I can respect the quality of what Steve and Marshall did, and I can respect the quality of what Denny O'Neil did with the Batman, and I can respect the quality of what we're doing now with Denny and Don Newton and Len and Irv, and I think they are all quality, entertaining approaches.
Bem: When you formulated your editorial direction for the Batman line, did you actually go back over the last ten years or so in order to select that which worked and learn from that which didn't?
PL: I re-read every Batman story ever written. I didn't read every word of every story but I thumbed through them all noting what was interesting and what I wanted to make part of my Batman. I decided upon my rules for when the modern Batman began. Nothing previous to Julie Schwartz's issues of BATMAN and DETECTIVE counts. Nothing before certain issues of WORLD'S FINEST and BRAVE AND BOLD count. Anything before that we decide whether it happened or not according to the demands of the storyline, mainly if we want to do a sequel.
Bem: Yet you brought back some of the characters, Batwoman for example.
PL: I wouldn't have if she hadn't been brought back recently. I featured her only to get rid of her. You won't be seeing the original Batgirl or Ace the Bathound, because as far as we're concerned they don't exist and never did.
Bem: Do you ever feel inclined to sort the whole mess out, in the style of Mark Gruenwald's OMNIVERSE?
PL: Let Gruenwald do it and the seven people who care can read it in OMNIVERSE, but why should I inflict it on 100,000 kids who wouldn't know the difference.
Bem: But you did something similar to that in bringing back the Justice Society, which undoubtedly confused a lot of kids who wondered why there were two Supermans running around, one of whom is thirty years older than the other.
PL: We didn't bring JUSTICE SOCIETY back to solve any continuity problems. We brought it back to make money. Every year the JLA/JSA team up has been our best selling issues. Therefore there seemed to be a lot of people interested in the Justice Society, so we decided to see if the group could justify a comic of their own even though there's no denying that it had itss confusing elements.
Bem: When a book fails how much of the blame should be attributed to the editor?
PL: It's the editor's job to put out a book that will succeed. However if luck, in the form of external enviromental factors, such as distribution, is against him there's little he can do about it because such factors are beyond his control. Yet he still has to bear the ultimate responsibility.
Bem: I've been trying to think of any successful new books that DC have come out with recently that haven't featured Superman or Batman or Wonder Woman.
PL: The last successful new book that anyone came out with was CONAN. Everything else has been an old book in disguise. New books that tie in with something successful outside the business, such as STAR WARS, don't count. They are not genuine comics growth. Conan counted because at the time CONAN came out there wasn't any other Conan stuff about. There have been no innovations since Conan that have worked.
Bem: Doesn't that make you somewhat worried? There are only so many permutations of Batman, Superman, Spiderman etc.
PL: ERB Inc. has been around for a long time living off Tarzan.
Bem: What I was referring to was the limited possibilities of starting new books based on those books.
PL: The need for new books is much overrated.
Bem: From a business point of view, would DC be unhappy if all they had were Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman?
PL: Yes, because you lose the possibility that something else will evolve into the next Superman or Batman. But that's really what the gamble is about. There is no ongoing need for new books but you just keep throwing the dice and hoping you come up with something big. Month in month out you're just as well off without them. Your average sales figure would probably be higher if you didn't try anything new that month.
Bem: Don't you find that somewhat pessimistic?
PL: No, it's reflective of where the industry is. Most of what we've been doing for the last ten years is living off pre-existing concepts because the particular product and packing form we're in is in the tail end of

its life cycle. It would be pessimistic to say that comics will be dead in five years time. I don't think that's true. Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman have been around for a long time and we're going to find ways of publishing them to make them successful for a long time to come because they're great characters.

Bem: Almost for ten years now people have been saying that the comics industry is very, very marginal. Is that situation improving or deteriorating?

PL: I don't know all the figures for the whole industry but there are signs of hope in a lot of directions. For example, the fan phenomenon growing into established collectors' stores, which is a whole new direction that is getting awfully big and may develop significantly.

Bem: When you look at the figures, comics appear to be selling a quarter of their sales in the sixties.

PL: But the distribution network is like that. That's why you're paying the price you are; forty cents for seventeen pages. In nineteen sixty we used to print a million copies of SUPERMAN and sell fifty five per cent of them on a routine basis. We could print seven hundred thousand copies of Lois Lane which didn't even make sense and still sell fifty per cent and they sure as hell aren't even on half a million print run. So you have entropy there and that's why you have to charge more just to stay in the same place.

Bem: Taking into account inflation and reduced page count, do you reckon comics cost more now in real terms?

PL: Of course, they have to because you're supporting the copies we have to trash. The distribution network's maximum sale in 1961 was eighty one per cent (it was a number one of one of Julie's early books); a maximum sale now is maybe sixty five per cent, and you're paying for that seventeen per cent difference.

Bem: Is anybody trying to evolve any new distribution methods?

PL: You have the fan stores; Marvel is making a tremendous push in that direction and we're also making some efforts, but not as much as I'd like to see. We're going back to subscriptions, and we've just run the biggest campaign for them since 1963. We're just starting to get a response to that so we don't know how that's doing. We're looking in another direction with the dollar comics and it's succeeded to some degree.

Bem: I'm surprised that Marvel haven't tried dollar comics yet.

PL: They don't feel that they've succeeded well enough to be worth their while. We don't feel that their magazine format has been that worthwhile. The different companies look at things in different ways.

Bem: Do you have different criteria?

PL: You have to understand that Warner Communications is a big company that makes an awful lot of money. The whole publishing division represents a small fraction of what they make. If we were the most successful comics company ever we would still only represent about one per cent of Warner's profit (ignoring the Superman movie for the sake of this argument), so it's impossible for us to make a lot of impact. Cadence Industries is mainly represented by Marvel Comics; Marvel is the bulwark of the corporation. If Marvel makes ten per cent more profit Cadence throw a party. If DC makes ten per cent more money Warner hardly notices. Therefore something that can be vastly successful for Marvel is almost an irrelevant improvement to DC. We have to look for things which will improve our profits a hundred per cent which means searching for a completely new answer to a problem. So such differences in scale obviously result in different criteria. For example Marvel feels that licensed comics (eg from movies or toys) are a sound business because they make money from the US publishing and from selling the foreign reprint rights for the period your license lasts, but you don't make money licensing the property for anything else. To our mind that cuts out too much potential income to make it worth the investment, with the exception of lucking out and getting Star Wars. If you feel you have something with the potential of Star Wars then we're interested, like Lord of the Rings for which we bidded. Something like MICRONAUTS may just be around for a couple of years and may make you some money but we'd rather gamble our money on something that may or may not succeed as a comic book but may also have television or movie spin offs in ten years time. For example we're now making money from the Plastic Man cartoon show on TV and we're bringing the character into ADVENTURE COMICS to keep him alive in comics. Thus with Plastic Man or any new character we develop we have various avenues of profit-making open to us, avenues which Marvel exclude from themselves. I'm not saying they're wrong. By their criteria, or philosophy, they may be making wonderfully sound investments.

Bem: Do you think Marvel are more aware of the prestige value of comics than DC? I'm thinking of something like WEIRDWORLD, or HOWARD THE DUCK, which garnered a lot of publicity for them.

PL: HOWARD THE DUCK lasted precisely until they saw the sales figures. They kept it alive a few issues more, hoping it would turn around but they cancelled because it stopped making money. They're trying it in a new format to see if it will start making money again but it certainly won't be around if it doesn't make money. WEIRDWORLD is out there because they want to see if it will work. If it works, they stand to make very, very good money. If it doesn't work, they stand to lose a lot of money. I don't think they're doing WEIRDWORLD for the prestige of doing a good comic. I think they're being very careful in saying that they think they've done a really fine comic book and that it's that which is important. That's what we did with Superman versus Ali. We invested more money, we had better paper stock, we put up with Neal Adams, all to produce a comic book that we thought would be beautiful. It didn't succeed terribly well, but we got some prestige, what ever that's worth in the bank. Not that I'm putting the value of prestige down; it has an intangible value on which you can't put a price tag. But neither company at this point is in the business for puuting out books which they don't think will sell, but if we put out a book which has a possible prestige value we'll naturally play that angle up as well.

Bem: Do DC have any plans along the lines of EPIC ILLUSTRATED?

PL: Not at present. Marvel's plans for EPIC seem to be dissolving. I heard today that it's down to quarterly, which strikes me as a death sentence. I would like to see EPIC succeed. I would like to see us doing a similar magazine, profitably. We know the sales figures for HEAVY METAL, but we're not awestruck by them. They're doing okay, but it doesn't strike us that they're cleaning up on any market. But our goal is not just to make a little more money. When you put out something like HEAVY METAL the only money you make is off publishing the magazine (and that includes advertising revenue). There is no possible profit beyond publishing. We've looked at the sales of HEAVY METAL and of the Marvel magazines, and at the printing quotes, and the break-evens, and we've seen that essentially it's the same thing as comics. The upward potential is fairly good, but is not astronomically better than comics. The downward potential is a horrendous loss. Marvel have had books that have sold in single-digit percentages which, at those cover prices, is disastrous. HEAVY METAL has done respectably pretty much throughout their run. We don't see that there's that much to win. It's no worse than comics, and of course you get prettier productions and the odd prestige item. But you're not opening any gateways to any possibly great successes. The only book Marvel have had that they've cleaned up on by our standards is KISS. That was a phenomenally lucky/intelligent choice. It hasn't worked for them again since on that scale. They don't have a sale we're envious of since KISS. However, if we saw tomorrow that Marvel was making a tremendous amount of money from that format, as fast as humanly possible we'd get into the same market.

Bem: But don't you think the creative people in comics have a greater chance to express themselves through the 'adult' comics?

PL: That's not our business. Our business is to make a profit.

Bem: Isn't it possible to make a profit and satisfy the people who work for you?

PL: I think we do a tremendous amount towards that, but our decisions regarding publishing a magazine have to be about whether it's financially viable. If it's viable we then consider how to make it as good as possible, and how to make it the best possible experience for the people working on it. We give a reasonable degree of creative freedom. We give a lot of respect to our creative people, and try and make it possible for them to do their job well, but part of our business is to provide those people with an income over a period of years. It's fundamentally in their interest that we make money because then they have continued employment. In fact it's in their interest that we make better money, because then we can pay them better. If they want to publish on the basis of a vanity press, with something that is totally their creative product and produced strictly on the basis of it being an expression of themselves then God bless. I'd love to see it done. I'd love to see some people in this industry with the guts and the money to go ahead and do it and I would hope to God that their endeavours would succeed wonderfully.

Bem: Don't you think it's possible that DC might be left drastically behind through Marvel capturing all the most exciting and creative people in this particular field, just as they were left behind in the sixties,

in fact, though for different reasons.
PL: That's always a possibility, but I don't think the things Marvel are doing have the potential to leave us drastically behind. If they did, I'd be more concerned about our getting involved with them. When you look at the Marvel sales in the sixties, you look month after month, and they were steadily climbing for about three years. We used to distribute their books so we have their sales records for the period. You can look and identify when F.F. 1 came out and when X-Men started. It's a pretty clear chart and it's gorgeous to see. We don't see anything like that with anything Marvel is doing now. Their straight-line comics sell a little better than ours, but not astronomically. They don't sell proportionally any better than ours than they did two or three years ago, which means they are not gaining ground. Their magazine line is not selling phenomenally, which you can see essentially by the fact that they don't have any continuing magazines. The only book they have that's been around for more than a week and a half is SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN. They haven't seen fit to repeat anything else. The magazines are doing well enough that they're continuing with them, but it's nothing that we have great envy of. If we saw anything resembling their sales chart of the sixties we would be rapidly wanting to know what they are doing and how we could learn how to do it. Unlike the people who were running DC in the sixties, we are now watching everything Marvel do. We're concerned with it, we're interested. They don't put out a book in any format that we don't price and work out the economics of that format. I can sit here and work out the break-evens of WEIRDWORLD on a paper napkin. We get their sales figures, and it's not tough to get spot checks, so you have an idea of how their books are doing. They do the same thing with ours, because they're fairly astute also. If they saw our dollar comics were selling 75% I'm sure that they would have a line of dollar comics out two weeks later. Our dollar comics fall into the area where we think they are successful and profitable for us but Marvel feels that they don't meet Marvel's criteria.
Bem: Does DC have any further plans as regards television, since it seems that Marvel is surging ahead on that score.
PL: I don't think they are at all. No comic book company has TV plans; people come to you and pay you money. We've had options out on a tremendous number of characters, and some of them have been picked up. We've made more money off the Superman movie than all the comic book companies put together have made off all the TV projects since comics started. We're negotiating for another major film right now. Marvel is consistently in negotiation about various properties. I wish them all the luck in the world. I don't think we're competitive in that field. I think everything they sell helps us sell. It all helps the business, and it's free money; we don't have to fight each other over it. The Superman movie was the best thing to hit the comic book business in a long, long time.
Bem: Considering that the 35¢, or 40¢, comic does seem to have a somewhat limited future, do you think that Marvel seems to be making more of an effort to find a viable alternative format?
PL: No, not at all. Marvel has looked at the magazine format, both in black and white and colour, but we're looking at the digest size; we're looking at books, and we're much more involved in the production of them than Marvel is. Marvel tends to sell book deals, which they immediately as fast as possible hand over to other people for them to handle. We package that material ourselves because we want the creative control, which we think is an integral part. I don't think the Marvel magazines solve any of the problems of the 35 cent comic. They don't sell better; their break-evens aren't any lower; their print runs aren't any higher. You may be in a prettier spot on the rack, but you haven't solved any problems. I wish they did, because then we'd jump on the bandwagon.
Bem: I know it's a difficult task, but could you possibly encapsule the DC philosophy and contrast it with that of Marvel?
PL: Do you mean commercially, financially or editorially?
Bem: Yes, all three, if possible.
PL: One important element of the Marvel

financial philosophy is that they believe in producing the lowest priced comics they can. We don't think that is integrally important. We don't think we've ever hurt by being at a higher price. We like to give the reader more for his money, whenever possible, but we don't think the hard dollar price is a bad thing in itself.
Bem: I find that really surprising. If the average comic buyer is the ten year old kid we're always led to believe it is, then surely if he sees a Spider-Man at 35¢ and a Batman at 40¢, he'll choose the Spider-Man.
PL: That's a perfectly rational argument; I can't disagree with it, but it doesn't seem to work. We don't sell any worse when we raise our price. Even when we're selling a nickel more than Marvel, which is usual in the price-change period, our sales don't suffer, and Marvel has the disadvantage of horrendously high break evens. Editorially it's harder to say. There's more diversity in the DC philosophy because the editors have a freer rein. At Marvel you have the realistic and logical problem that Stan Lee evolved the company. It all has to be derivative of him and therefore a good Marvel comic is in some way a linear descendent of his work. That isn't the case at DC, where there are a variety of different ways of doing things, so we have more freedom, and I guess that's part of the difference in the creative approach. We have tended over the years to be more plot orientated, and more diverse artistically. Although Marvel is getting out of it now, there was a phase when all the art was in the Kirby/Buscema mold. In terms of business philosophy, I think an important difference is that we're looking forward to the 1990's. We're interested in things that will be making DC money when I'm ready to retire. Marvel does not seem to be orientated that far ahead. They're more concerned with what will be making money for Marvel in the next five years. Marvel is therefore gambling on more things that are more visible, all of which may, of course, succeed and may be more important than what we're doing. We're trying for a definite linear progression, a lot of which is invisible, such as doing dummies for projects which may not come out for five years or so. A lot of things may never reach you even though they serve our business, bearing in mind that we are the proprieters of Superman, and that is fundamentally our business. If we can find some way of making Superman a stronger, more powerful character in the public eye, then we're doing our job.
Bem: Would you care to put a time span on your stay in comics?
PL: I'll continue to stay as long as the challenges keep coming. Financially, I have more than satisfied my childhood ambitions. I do much better from this business than I had any right to ever expect. Creatively, I never wanted to be a writer, so I've already satisfied what creative ambitions I had. I never really dreamed I could edit the Batman books; that wasn't part of my achievable world when I got into this business. I have minor ambitions, such as writing certain strips at some point, but the main thing is that I want to keep growing. I want to be smarter than I am today; I want to be able to do more things.
Bem: How old are you?
PL: Twenty-two.
Bem: What do you expect to be doing when you're thirty-two?
PL: Something new, something challenging. When I did THE COMIC READER I built it up until there was a new and larger challenge there. It was successful and I'm very proud of that; it's as complete a success to me as what I've done at DC. I got involved with DC and I'm still growing there. I've learned a lot of new skills I didn't have before. I got myself involved in the legal end of things so I understand about contracts and so forth, which is a new addition to my art form, a new skill for my portfolio. As long as I can keep adding things to the deck of skills I'm playing with, then I'm happy. As soon as I can sit down and say, "I know how to do all of this, and I'm doing it as well as I can.", then it'll be time to move on to another field. I may at that point face a difficult choice about whether I'll be prepared to make less money, and that may keep me in comics, or perhaps it'll be a question of accepting a job with much less authority and responsibility than I have now.
Bem: Can you ever see yourself swopping the problems of DC for the problems of Marvel?
PL: One of my idle dreams, often mentioned at our poker games, is to go and clean up the mess there, but I wouldn't do it for the kind of money Jim Shooter is making. He's being paid a fraction of what the job is worth. I wouldn't take the job without the authority to do it properly, and I don't know whether it would work even then. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with working at Marvel comics. They certainly have good characters. But I prefer working for a big conglomerate because they can put you in nice soft padded offices, and it's more comfortable, as opposed to working in a place where you have to fight to get a desk which was made in the 1812 war. Nevertheless, there are a lot of good people at Marvel, and a lot of good things to do. I envy very much people who are in the position to go in and face a challenge like that.

At that precise moment the security alarm system of the hotel started screeching like something from "The China Syndrome", there was an announcement for Glynis Wein to report to reception and Len entered the lobby, looking somewhat harrassed. So the interview ended rather abruptly and I didn't really get the chance to thank Paul properly for the lengthy amount he donated, so I'm doing so now: thank you, Paul Levitz.

- Mike Cruden.

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AMERICAN COMICS FOR AMIABLE COLLECTORS

CHRIS GAVIN

H.M.S. Conqueror

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT CAPTAIN RUSSELL, BUT MOST OF US ABOARD "THE CONQUEROR" WERE FEELING DECIDEDLY UNEASY.

ACTING ON SPECIAL ORDERS, WE'D SLIPPED IN SO CLOSE TO A VERON OUTWORLD I KEPT TALKING IN A WHISPER. AND NOW, HERE CAME THE SHIP WE'D BEEN TOLD TO PICK UP...

FENRIS

... WITH A VERON PATROL SHIP IN HOT PURSUIT! THIS HAD ALL THE MAKINGS OF A DIPLOMATIC INCIDENT...

IT'S DEFINITELY OUR PEOPLE IN THE LEAD VESSEL, CAPTAIN!

PLUS UNINVITED GUESTS, LIEUTENANT FLIFF. OPEN THE HANGER TO VACUUM READY--IT'LL BE A CLOSE-RUN THING!

YOU'D BETTER CALL COMMODORE JENKINS, AND ASK HIM TO MEET ME BY THE HANGER AIRLOCK.

RUSSELL

THIS ISN'T GOING TO BE EASY!

1

MARTIN LOCK ·Writer·

STEPHEN BASKERVILLE ·Guest Artist·

Page One Pencilled by DAVE HARWOOD

NOT EASY AT ALL--ESPECIALLY WITH THE COMMODORE INVOLVED!

AIRLOCK

VACUUM READY

THE PRESSURE'S EQUALIZED NOW, SIR. WE'RE READY FOR THE CAPTAIN---

NO NEED TO WAIT, LIEUTENANT.

OPEN THE DOOR!

FENRIS HERE AND I ARE GREATLY GLAD YOU TOOK US ABOARD, SIR!

IT WAS THE REASON WE CAME HERE, MR. SCORE.

WE DO HAVE A PROBLEM, THOUGH, IN THAT THE VERON SHIP HAS MANAGED TO COME ABOARD TOO.

WE DID INDEED, SPACEMAN.

I AM CHAN RIGAA, MASTER OF THE ORBITAL PATROL VESSEL "GOD'S ARROW", AND I DEMAND THAT YOU DO NOT GIVE SANCTUARY TO THIS COMMON SPY!

SNIFF! SNIFF!

SEE WHAT I MEANT ABOUT A DIPLOMATIC INCIDENT?

QUICKLY, FRANK, ARRANGE FOR THE STARBOARD SECURITY WATCH TO GET INTO THE HANGER VIA MAINTENANCE AND GET THE VERONS COVERED--

--BEFORE THEY GET ANY IDEAS!

RIGHT AWAY, MA'AM!

2

AND SO, WHEN BRUTE FORCE FAILS, THANKS TO FLUFFY'S QUICK THINKING--DIPLOMACY TAKES OVER...

THE SITUATION IS SIMPLE. SCORE HERE IS A SPY, TRYING TO LEARN VERON DEFENCE SECRETS.

HE TRIED TO ESCAPE, WE OF THE VERON SKYWATCH PURSUED HIM--

HE IS OUR PRISONER!

HE IS A TERRAN SUBJECT ON A TERRAN DEEP SPACE VESSEL WITH AMBASSADORIAL STATUS IN THIS SECTOR.

YOU TERRANS THINK YOU OWN THE GALAXY!

YOUR GODLESS WARSHIP WAS WAITING FOR SCORE, HIDING BEHIND OUR MOON FOR A SECRET RENDEZVOUS WITH THIS SPY. YOU CAN'T FOOL US!

WE UNDERSTAND YOUR FEELINGS, CHAN RIGAA, BUT PLEASE SEE OUR POINT OF VIEW.

A TERRAN CITIZEN COMES TO US FOR SANCTUARY! HAVE YOU ANY PROOF OF MR. SCORE'S...er...ACTIVITIES?

AND WHEN I HEARD THE COMMODORE'S TONE I BEGAN TO GET REALLY WORRIED.

AFTER ALL, IT'S NOT WHAT YOU SAY-- IT'S THE WAY THAT YOU SAY IT!

H.M.S. CONQUEROR HAS NOT VIOLATED ANY VERON SPACE-LANES, CHAN RIGAA.

AND H.M.S. CONQUEROR IS TERRAN TERRITORY, CHAN.

I AM NO DIPLOMAT, EARTH-MEN; I COMMAND A WARSHIP, I FOUGHT AGAINST YOUR KIND IN THE 'JUST WAR'. WE WILL GO BACK ABOARD GOD'S ARROW, AND SPEAK TO OUR LEADERS.

WE LEAVE YOU TO CONSIDER CAREFULLY YOUR ACTIONS!

3

AND FROM THE WAY THE CAPTAIN AND THE COMMODORE DISAPPEARED FROM SIGHT, CAREFUL CONSIDERATION WAS THE ORDER OF THE DAY.

FOR ALMOST TWO WATCHES A FRAGILE CALM DESCENDED ON THE CONQUEROR AND ITS GUESTS...

UNTIL--

CAPTAIN RUSSELL'S COMPLIMENTS, SIR--CAN YOU COME TO THE BRIDGE RIGHT AWAY?

WE'VE RECEIVED AN ANSWER FROM 'DEFENCE CENTRAL', FL'FF?

NO, COMMODORE.

A VERON BATTLECRUISER IS APPROACHING!

IT'S A *VERON* WITHOUT DOUBT, SIR. ONE OF THEIR NEWEST AND *DEADLIEST* BATTLESTRIKERS!

WE COULD TAKE IT IF NECESSARY, THOUGH, *LUKE*--

IT WON'T COME TO THAT, *CAPTAIN!*

BUT, COMMODORE, YOU CAN'T MEAN--

THE DECISION HAS TO BE MADE, *RUSSELL!* WE CANNOT START A *WAR* OVER JUST ONE MAN!

SO, YOU ARE SENSIBLE, COMMODORE! ONE SPY IS NOT WORTH A WAR!

I'LL COME WITH YOU, CHAN-- BUT YOU HAVEN'T WON!

LOOK AFTER FENRIS, WILL YOU, LIEUTENANT FL'FF?

I WILL...

FAREWELL, GENTLEMEN. WE SHALL MEET AGAIN!

CAPTAIN-- THIS WAS NOT A GOOD DAY'S WORK--

Ah, but it was, my friend.

The Verons got not a Terran spy--

"--BUT AN ELECTRONIC DECOY! AFTER A FEW MINUTES DETACHED FROM MY LEAD, SCORE WILL BREAK DOWN..."

...and let me tell you, the stench will be awful!

THE END

IN BEM-32, DAVE HARWOOD RETURNS, AND H.M.S. CONQUEROR EMBARKS ON A NEW ADVENTURE! BE THERE!

Bemuscene

MOON KNIGHT #1 (November)
by Doug Moench, Bill Sienkiewicz, and Bill and Franki S.

Y'know, I've got mixed feelings about this 24-page origin story... I mean, it's drawn by a Neal Adams clone, and it also completely contradicts the origin for the "Lunar Crusader Rabbit" which Doug gave in WEREWOLF BY NIGHT #32, August '75 (an excellent year...but I digress) (not for the first time)... Sure, we only had Marc Spector's word for it, but it tied in with the running plotline of that book, and for Doug-baby to come back five years later talking about mysterious Egyptian tombs, and Spector's corpse (?) being returned to life by a statue of Khonshu, known as the Taker of Vengeance, and claiming the cape from its shoulders...well...

However, maybe Marc was kidding Jack Russell and The Committee; the new origin has got more...style? And, in the proper way, it ties in with a succulent slice of vengeance for Marc 'n' Marlene in the last half of the tale. Doug, we trust you.

Now, is Bill Sienkiewicz a Neal Adams clone, a mere Mike Nasser with the Adams faces and foibles, without the narrative skills and raw feeling of the real thing? Hmm? Adams copied--or absorbed, and built upon? My vote is for the latter...

An ebulient fan following from his full-colour series in Hulk Magazine got him this present-day rarity, a Marvel first issue that's not licensed from a toy; but will a white-cloaked avenger of the night, an albino Batman, sell comics? Not even K. Williams knows for sure... -Jonn Hay

MYSTERY IN SPACE #113 (November)
"Trouble in Paradise" by George Kashdan, Michael Golden & Bob Wiacek; "Passages" by Len Wein & Joe Staton; "The Eyes of the Bekkitt" by J.M. deMatteis & Jerry Grandenetti; "Gremlins" by Wein & Joe Kubert; and "Beasts of Burden" by Kashdan, Trev von Eeden & John Celardo

This is like TIME WARP, and features material originally intended for that book. Both titles have tried to recapture the mood of the sci-fi comics of the '50s --and have succeeded. Most of the contributors excel themselves, despite the usual couple of bad jobs.

A lot of people criticize this type of comic, and yet they are the best sort. 100% science fiction is what this comic tries to be, and 100% science fiction is what it succeeds in being. You cannot help enjoying it; so what if some stories are not truly original, they're fun, and very enjoyable, perfect for reading when you don't have much time, with no continuing storylines. In fact, it's a very pleasant change in these days of sub-plots, multi-part stories & complicated personal lives.

The stories here are great, enjoyable, and usually have an intelligent theme and ending; I won't list them individually, there's no reason to with a comic as excellent as this. I hope you all at least sample a copy of Mystery In Space, it may not feature the real cream of talent from America every issue, but most contributors put on a good show. Try it. -Steve Bailey

THOR #300 (October)
"Twilight of the Gods" by Gruenwald, Macchio, Pollard & Day

"Special 300th Issue"...and very special it is indeed. The wrap-up of the Siegfried & Thor saga, then Odin and all the Earthly gods against the first Celestials, the reasons for the creation of the Destroyer and the Odinsword, and finally Asgard, the Destroyer and Thor versus the Celestials. Fantastic. And I've not mentioned all of what happens. A shock ending, and a twist within a twist.

Thor has never been this good before. Although Keith Pollard has never been one of my favourite pencillers, he has done an admirable job; his layouts are tight and accurate. Gene Day's inking is amazing --serving to both embellish and strengthen the pencils. Even Carl Gafford's colouring is worthy of mention. All I can say now is, I enjoyed it one hell of a lot. Buy it, you might too. -Matthew Moorcroft

2000AD SCI-FI SPECIAL (1980)
Judge Dredd in "The Greatest Story Ever Told" by A.A. Grant & Steve Dillon; "The Robot Revolution" by G.P. Rice & Trev Goring; "A Holiday in Hell" by Alan Moore & Dave Harwood; "The Wanderer" + "Colony 9" by Floyd Hughes; "The Steel Claw" by persons unknown; and "The Final Secret" by The Mighty One & Robin Smith

With a cover price of a mere 45 pence, this is a very good buy for sf fans like me. The cover is a picture of Judge Dredd by Mike McMahon, and inside it's filled with lots of interesting articles and strips. Page three begins a 10-page Dredd strip with great artwork by Steve Dillon, about the Fergie statue coming alive for a movie; interesting layouts.

Next stop is an article on sf writer Harry Harrison, who did the stories about Jim DiGriz, "The Stainless Steel Rat"; his other books are mentioned, although not in detail, and there's also a poem. All good stuff. Then, after the THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK photo-feature, there is the story "The Robot Revolution", another one of Ro-Jaws' Robo-Tales. Good artwork and ok storyline.

The next story comes complete with Dave Harwood artwork. Yes, his name does sound familiar, doesn't it? The story is also all right, but I'll not spoil the fun by revealing the plot; Dave's artwork is good, but I feel it was not as good as his art for the H.M.S. Conqueror series. See what you think.

Next is an 8-page thing about what the future holds for our houses, in "House of the Future", with lots of diagrams. In 2000AD the cost of a house will be just 5,000,000 credits. What a bargain.

After a few more strips we come to the best one (I like the story, though only because I dig these Tharg mini-stories) of all; "The Final Secret" is all about what makes Tharg the greatest in the galaxy. Want to find out? Then buy the special! -Simon Bostock

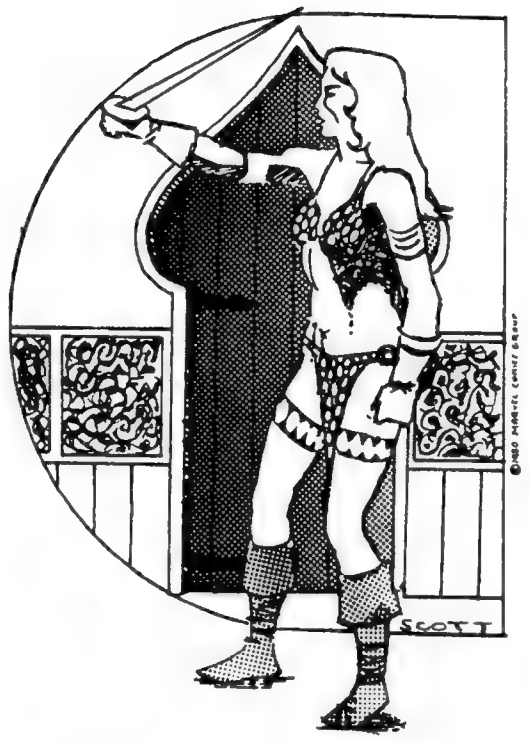
WARLORD #38 (October)
"The Shape of Things Gone By" by Mike Grell & Vince Colletta; OMAC in "The Decision" by Jim Starlin & Romeo Tanghal

The two tales here have one point in common: in both the pencils are killed off by the inkers, leaving layouts only to remind us what each penciller can do.

The complaint about Warlord this issue is the usual: the plotting seems non-existent, and the scripting tired and uninspired. Travis Morgan meets his daughter, who has come to find him, complains to him because he left her, apologizes when she sees he's some kind of hero, and disappears into the sunset with her boyfriend, who was to kill Warlord but changed his mind. D.U.L.L.

OMAC is a fine second feature. A nice tongue-in-cheek science fiction tale. Where else could you find a villain called Wiley Quixote? Excellent plotting and pacing, and decent scripting.

Altogether a readable package, but if they tried a bit harder... Well, maybe next issue. -Matthew Moorcroft



THE STUDIO

Published by Dragon's Dream, this is basically a showcase for the work of four popular artists working on the perimeter of the American comics sphere--Jeff Jones, Barry Smith, Mike Kaluta & Berni Wrightson --all of whom now share a loft studio together in Manhattan. 'The Studio' is a large-format book containing some 160 pages. Its chief failing is that it tends to be a little too uncritical at times. The written material stresses only the various artists' strong points, and it glosses over whatever shortcomings they may have.

The book opens with a section devoted to the work of Jeff Jones, whom I personally regard as one of the most outstanding talents ever to have dabbled in the comics genre. Jones' work is usually a joy to behold. His paintings, drawings and comic strips are all rendered in an unmistakable style, at once economical and sophisticated. Jones always employs an absolute minimum of detail. His grasp of lighting and shading effects ('chiaroscuro') is second to none. His figures are all lean and aesthetic-looking. They have noble, vaguely Patrician faces, with large heavy-lidded eyes full, petulant, downturned mouths.

'The Studio' contains a few of Jones' less accomplished pieces. 'Chastity', for instance, is quite an ordinary study, and 'Judith' is a frankly dreadful piece, featuring a glaring and totally inharmonious use of colour. In my view, it is with such pictures as 'Young Girl', 'The Rose', 'Nereid', 'Despair' and 'Peace' that Jones excels. I find their sparse, uncluttered look very effective indeed. I believe that they confirm Jones as a master of his art.

Just as a matter of interest, Jones' method of creating a picture differs radically from Smith's. Smith is obviously a meticulous worker. He builds his paintings up "a square inch at a time," working with a great amount of care and patience. Jones on the other hand is a little more 'slap-dash' in his approach. He is able to achieve creditable results via "a series of happy accidents". Both men are accomplished artists, but for my money Jones is the better of the two. In 'Idyl' Jones ventured the opinion that "Art is when you do something with unusual perception." Jones himself is an unusually perceptive painter.

The second part of 'The Studio' is devoted to Mike Kaluta, whose work I

personally do not like. It contains a number of factors which I find offputting: an altogether too self-consciously anachronistic sense of style; a garish, almost bilious use of colour; and a very cramped, cluttered, claustrophobic overall feel. To be fair, 'The Studio' does contain a few decent sketch-book illoes, unfinished and hence relatively uncluttered, and a few good finished pictures, notably 'The Very Same Dream Night After Night', and the distinctly Windsor McCay-ish 'The Fate of Dollies Lost in Dreams'. But on the whole, I feel that the Kaluta section is the least satisfying of the lot.

The section devoted to the work of Barry Smith (I refuse to pander to his pomposity by calling him 'Windsor-Smith'), however, is pretty good. The early Smith prints and paintings are recognizably based on the work he did in the comic-book sphere: 'The Ram And The Peacock'... 'The Four Ages'...'Four Robert E. Howard Characters' (including a lovely moody study of Bran Mak Morn)...'Pandora'...'The Enchantment' ...'Something Ic Waas'-- all are obvious extensions of his stint on the 'Conan' series. With 'The Devil's Lake', however, a change in Smith's approach becomes apparent. His 'arty' aspirations become more pronounced. 'The Devil's Lake' is a striking piece of work. The central figure is a near-naked winged female--a perfect fantasy image. Her wings symbolize the power of flight, to which we all aspire in our dreams. Her partial nudity and her good looks identify her as an object of sexual desire. Yet she is trapped--caught in the branches of a gnarled tree above a brilliant blue lake. Smith claims that the picture is "about drug-addiction"; but such an interpretation would hardly be apparent to an uninformed viewer.

One point I feel bound to make about Smith is that he strikes me as a rather affected person. This business of changing his name to 'Windsor-Smith', discussing his suicidal musings (on page 118), and describing himself as a 'manic-Romantic' --it all seems like an artificial attempt to create an 'image' to me, rather than an honest expression of Smith's character. this impression (which may, I admit, be quite erroneous) is reinforced by the direction Smith's work has taken in the recent past. The oil painting 'Fate Sowing the Stars' is a good example of what I mean: an allegorical piece done in a kind of High Renaissance style, it looks too much like a deliberate retreat from the conventions of Twentieth Century art for comfort. The only word I can find to describe it is 'pretentious'. Still, that is only my opinion...

The final section showcases the work of Berni Wrightson, undoubtedly one of this century's foremost illustrators of weird subjects. Since he made his debut in a 'pro' magazine, on a 'Creepy' Fan Club page, he's certainly come a long way. 'The Studio' makes no attempt to trace his early development (strips in the likes of 'Castle of Frankenstein', 'Web of Horror' and so on), but focusses on his mature work: such posters and prints as 'Taking No Chances', 'Bad Doin's In Knuckledown's Lonesome', 'Loggerhead' and 'Counsel to a Minion'.

Wrightson's work is a highly individual fusion of the best of Frazetta, Jones and Ingels. In his time, he has created a unique array of grotesqueries--vampires, reanimated corpses, dragons, dinosaurs and demons out of Hell... His characters leer out at the viewer with expressions at once comic and frightening. His illustrations for 'Frankenstein', done in a painstaking pen and ink technique which "pretends to be a cross between a woodcut and a steel engraving, "capture the mood of Shelley's stodgy, impenetrable 'masterpiece' perfectly. It's hard to imagine any other illustrator doing such an appropriate job of work. His posters etc are stylish combinations of artistic skill and sound business sense. That is, they don't simply look good; they are for the most part very commercially-orientated as well.

Of the Wrightson paintings reproduced in 'The Studio', my favourites are 'Bad Doin's', 'Loggerhead' and 'Murders in the Rue Morgue'... Your opinions may differ from mine. Check and see...

At one point, the four artists represented in 'The Studio' are referred to as the 'New Romantic' school of painting. I don't think this classification is altogether appropriate. But nevertheless, they are all outstanding fantasy illustrators with a lot to offer. And 'The Studio' is a fine tribute to their talents. Buy it.

(PS: In the section on Jeff Jones, mention is made of a French book devoted to Jones' work. If anyone has any information on this book, would they please get in touch with me. Huh?) -Pete Scott

THE X-MEN #139 (November)
"Something Wicked This Way Comes" by Chris, John & Terry

After the necessary re-evaluation in the previous issue, following the high drama of #137, it's a relief to see the book back to its normal standard. Cyclops has departed; the Angel, though, is back in the ol' Danger Room, and Kitty Pride joins the team as "Sprite". Though she does nothing more dangerous than tidy up a broom closet this issue, she seems to me an excellent character. I guess she brings out the young teenager in all of us, completely out of her depth with the big kids, but eager to learn!

The art? Well, it's pencilled by the best comics artist working regularly for an American comics company today, and the inker is no slouch either, so it's no surprise that it's Pretty Good-- and, 5 more pages! This also gives Claremont a chance to fit in some of those precious quiet moments that turn a slug-fest into a story.

No recommendation is needed, is it? If you haven't bought your copy yet, I just hope you've got it on order. Alpha Flight ...Wolverine's new costume, and Professor Xavier's reaction to Wolverine calling him "Charlie"... Danger Room teamwork... and a large, flesh-hungry monster leaping at Nightcrawler on page 22. Face it, this one's got it all! -C.N. Padgett

DETECTIVE COMICS #496 (November)
"Murder on the Mystery Ship" by Michael Fleisher, Don Newton & Dan Adkins, and Batgirl in "Stealer of Souls" by Cary Burkett, José Delbo & Bob Smith

If this, the first slim-line issue after fifteen Dollar Comics, is the shape of things to come, then the longest surviving hero comic is in a poor way. The logo is a variant of one last seen a dozen years ago--and the same can be said of Michael Fleisher's lead story, with a mad horror film star terrorizing a jetset party. A twist ending there is, and a clue for the World's Greatest Detective (or bully, or schizo -- the poor chap's awfully serious these days, since Robin moved out in fact --was Dr Wertham right?) to trip over, but it's not a good enough tale to carry a book all by itself.

The Batgirl story, due to the change in format, runs 10 pages, relegating the lettercol to a few paragraphs at the end of the lead tale; all in all, a 10-page lettercol would have been better. The story's silly, the sub-plots misguided, the art cartoony in a sloppy way (but is that Paul Levitz on page 5's penultimate panel?)--I really haven't a good word to say for it. Presumably, now that Batgirl is half of 'Tec rather than one-fifth, more work will be done to upgrade the feature to a tolerable level. Don Heck and Gerry Conway, perhaps? -Jonn Hay

MARVEL PREMIERE #56 (October)
Dominic Fortune in "The Big Top Barter Resolution" by Len Wein, Howard Chaykin, David Michelinie, Howard Chaykin again, and Terry Austin

David Fortunov's initial outing in four colour comics, after a number of appearances in both black & white and colour magazines, is more than a little reminiscent of Chaykin's two issues of "The Scorpion" for the gone (and forgotten) Atlas line of 1976, as many fans must have expected -- why, he even fights a lion on pages 9 and 10, as did Mr Frost in the opening pages of Scorpion #2. The art, however, is slightly different -- neater and more conventional -- due to the inks of Terry Austin.

The plot involves a circus, a mentalist and his assistant, and one Spencer Keene, who is the charming villain-type. This last wants to buy the circus, so that he can use the mentallist, Cephallo, to open a safe he was left in his father's will ...said safe being rigged to explode "if their locks were even touched!" The owner of the circus, however, doesn't want to sell it--and, to spite Keene, uses it as a gambling stake. The trouble starts when he loses...to the house, which means Dom's friend Sabbath ends up owning the circus, which was formerly the property of one Dum-Dum Dugan (yes, the same Mr Dugan who now appears regularly in reprints in Sgt Fury). Then Cephallo's assistant, Glory, is kidnapped by Keene...

This is a good one-issue yarn, wrapped in a good cover, reminiscent of Scorpion #1 and also issue 32 of this very comic, which featured Monark Starstalker; Dominic works well in this format, I'd like to see a regular title for him, but I don't think he has the necessary mass appeal. Perhaps he could share a double-feature title with the Black Widow, like the Dr Strange/SHIELD "Strange Tales" of yore? -Tim Bateman

GHOST RIDER #50 (November)
"Manitou's Anger...Tarantula's Sting" by Michael Fleisher & Don Perlin

That a basically bad comic like this should reach its half-century is a cause for celebration, I guess, so here's a double-length story in which Johnny Blaze is mystically sent back to the wild west to team up with Carter Slade, the original white-clad Ghost Rider (now called Night Rider to avoid confusion) against his old foe, the Tarantula.

Don Perlin's art is functional as ever, and Mike Fleisher gets away from the "TV Hulk" formula he's been tending to apply on this title; 35 pages of story gives plenty of room for battles physical and mystical, but not much in the way of characterization here. With the cut-back in ads there's room too for a three-page "Gallery of Guest Stars", while the letter column is given over to a GR index, not as complete as it should be. Daredevil 138 and Premiere 28 they remember -- what about GR's Team-Up appearances, though?

I was never a fan of Marvel's imitation superhero westerns, with secret identities 'in the tradition of Spider-Man", but it is good to see Night Rider back. Marvel never forget even the most minor hero, do they! But Ghost Rider is quite readable these days, even if it's not in the fan sales top thirty -- it makes a pleasant change from good comics... -Jonn Hay

THE MICRONAUTS #24 (December)
"Computrex", plus "Aegypta", by Bill Mantlo, Pat Broderick & Armando Gil

Fifteen pages of lead story, a five-page Tale of the Microverse, a double-page map of Homeworld...these extra pages do give flexibility!

Pat Broderick was an inspired choice for penciller on this book; and teamed with Armando Gil, he's producing art that easily matches the Golden standard. This feeds back on author/creator Bill Mantlo --and, in short, this book's really going well again!

"Computrex" really gets tough with our micro-heroes; but it's in the back that the shape of things to come is now being unveiled. Prince Shaitan is alive, and--well, he's captured Slug, and Prince Argon (the centaur) is in his power. But Prince Pharoid of Aegypta rides to the rescue; and, with Slug, he returns to his kingdom in the caves, the birthplace of Baron Karza. Shaitan is still free, and speaks of his "Master's" plan...and who would he call "Master" but Baron Karza?

If you turned away from this book when Golden left, it's time to look at it again --it seems to me you're just in time for another epic multi-part struggle for the Microverse! -Ruan Lanihorne

EERIE #114 (September)
"Star Warrior" by David Jacobs & A.L. Sanchez; "The Executioners" by Carlos Gimenez; and "Haxtur: Panthers, Wolves and Death" by Victor de la Fuente

Only three stories for £1.75 -- but at least they're new. In reverse order, the Haxtur piece is just two brief six-page encounters, neither of which is a story in itself--and stringing the two together doesn't help. "The Executioners", however, is a strong, dramatic 12-page tale, with loose but expressive art. What happens can't be explained, as the cold-blooded decision to kill one survivor on the wrecked spaceship is followed through, it's gripping...memorable.

31 pages, however, are given over to a routine space-adventure, heavy on violence and vengeance. It moves along quickly, which helps keep the unlikeliness of the plot out of mind; the art is pleasant, a touch reminiscent of Nestor Redondo and Rudy Nebres. Three shorter stories would have been better, giving fuller value for what's really quite a lot of money; this trend to less and longer stories in Eerie isn't a good idea. -C.N. Padgett

JUDGE DREDD ANNUAL 1981
96 pages; IPC; £1.80

At last, a British annual that's not a hurried assortment of hoary old reprints, boring and inappropriate text fillers, and cheap young artists who'd never get work on the relevant weekly. Annuals are usually bought by parents, so the theory is that the contents aren't important... but here's an annual that dares to be well written, drawn, produced and edited.

The high-quality colour pages are given over entirely to brand-new Judge Dredd stories, written by John Howard and drawn by Mike McMahon. "Pinboing Wizard" (six pages) features giant-size pinball, with each player in a "boing" bubble; "The Fear That Made Milwaukee Famous" (16 pages), out in the Cursed Earth; and "Compulsory Purchase" (7 pages), a heart-moving tale of a medical emergency. They're all good, strong stories, with the humorous twist John "Howard" Wagner does so well.

2000AD's editor Steve McManus himself contributes a 5-page article on how Judge Dredd was developed as a character for the comic; this leads into the very first Dredd story written (by Mills & Wagner) and drawn (by Carlos Sanchez Ezquerra), but never before printed due to the lack of outlandish sf that became the strip's hallmark, and the decision at the last minute that while Dredd was a judge, he wasn't jury and executioner too! It's an impressive debut story, though.

"Max Normal" stars in an 11-page strip by Alan Grant and Casanovas; Walter the Wobot gets an 8-page fable by G.P. Rice and Brendan McCarthy, which takes place (appropriately) in Eisner Block. There's a 6-page Dredd text tale, illustrated by Dave Gibbons; and a 7-page robo-tale by Rogan and O'Neill demonstrates that heads of old war robots can get reactivated, in a sequence like a domestic "Alien".

There's a Judge quiz, pin-ups, examples of Dredd art by all 14 artists who've drawn the character in 2000AD, a "Trans-Time" travel brochure on Mega-City One; it's all interesting, and, by this year's prices, excellent value. Don't miss out on this annual; it's bound to become a collectors' item. -Ruan Lanihorne

KATHOLICITY

The other day I picked up a second-hand copy of a book called "Name Your Baby"--no, I don't actually need it, it was only that it was such a bargain at 2p and the subject does interest me--which gives the meanings of about a thousand names. As I read it, I began to wonder if a writer about to create a new character ever deliberately chooses a name with an appropriate meaning. So I looked up some well-known names from comics--and came to the conclusion that some are very appropriate, and others... Well, Conan means "intelligent". Need I say more?

Beginning with the Senior Superhero--Kal-El, we have been told, means "star-child". And Clark means the obvious "one who can write". Pretty appropriate. But Lois means "famous in war", whereas she is mainly famous for being accident-prone. And Lex, of all things, means "law". Bruce of course was originally a surname--that of Robert The (you'd be surprised how many tourists think "The" was actually his middle name) Bruce, a man more associated with spiders than bats -- although there might well have been bats in his cave as well. Bats also hang about in belfries--so Kirk ("of the church") Langstrom's name is pretty apposite. But poor old Batgirl is "a foreigner", and the Huntress was hardly called by an appropriate name--Helena means "light". Her mother Selina, "of the moon", was better. Alfred means "elf-counsel", which seems a bit odd for a butler. And Richard "rule-hard" Grayson is going to have a tough time if he tries to live up to his name in the new Teen Titans, where the females have all the real powers.

Adam means "Earth"--pretty ironic when you consider Mr Strange. While Flash seems to have got Green Arrow's name by mistake --Barry means "marksman". And Oliver, which derives from "olive-tree" and so from the traditional symbol of peace, is not very appropriate for GA. Neither is Ralph ("counsel-wolf") for the Elongated Man -- and Aquaman's name is positively weird--Arthur means "bear-hero". If Green Lantern is a Harold ("army-power") his name is apt too, but if he is a Henry ("home-ruler") not so much so. Ronald ("power-force") and Diana ("divine") are pretty good too. The Marvel Family are very well-named on the male side--William means "protector" and Frederick "peace-rule". But Mary means "bitter". It's maybe easier with alien-type names, because these are generally pretty neat. Mera could certainly derive from the French word for "sea", and Kara from the Greek "koré"--"maiden". And Alanna means "darling" in Irish--and probably in Rannian too.

Over at Marvel, the incongruities seem to predominate over the aptnesses. I mentioned Conan; his lady-friend's name, Sonja, means "wisdom". And look at the FF --Reed has nothing to do with bulrushes, it means "red". If you bear that in mind while reading an uncensored version of the origin story it makes it pretty silly. Benjamin means "son of the right hand", which is pretty incongruous applied to any man, much less a Thing. Susan means "a lily", and John "Grace of God". (the masculine and feminine derivatives of this name apply to many characters, including the Wasp and Shanna the She-Devil.) Peter means "a rock" and does not have much relevance to the neurotic Spider-Man, the paranoid Quicksilver or even much to the metallic Colossus. Anthony ("priceless, praiseworthy") and Donald ("world-ruler") aren't bad. Stephen, however, means "a wreath". I suppose if you think of it as a laurel wreath it could be worse. Spider-woman's name is very ominous. "God is looking", it warns sternly. Power Man's monicker means "light", and Iron Fist's "judge" (Hey, does that mean a certain resident of Mega-City One should actually be called Daniel Dredd, not Joe?). Daredevil, would you believe, is a "gift of God". God can have the male chauvinist, no-****** idiot back from me.

The Hulk Family has some really silly names--Robert means "fame-bright", Bruce could be deemed to mean "a particularly heroic king", and cousin Jennifer means "fair and yielding". Even the TV version is silly--David means "beloved". I hesitated over who has the daftest name in Marveldom -- the Hellcat (Patricia -- "an aristocrat") and Ka-Zar (Kevin--"gentle") were strong contenders--but the winner has to be J.J. Jameson. Jonah means "dove".

I cannot close without revealing all about some of my fellow Bem-contributors. Martin means "warlike". Now you know why we're all scared to miss a deadline. Michael means "like unto God". Pause for laugh. Nigel can mean either "a champion" or "black". Mr Williams also has a choice --his name can mean "wind" or it can mean "wood". Not much of a choice. What's that? Oh, Kathleen means "pure". What else?

I want to take this opportunity to give my congratulations and best wishes to the Godlike One and his Lily, and tell them I would be prepared to sell them a "Name Your Baby" book, very cheap. -KATHLEEN GLANCY

Reaction

John Murphy I don't think that Phil Greenaway was being very fair on last year's con. You cannot really compare the Albacon with Comicon, contentswise. Not everyone would get a thrill from continuous Star Trek episodes and I'm not that interested in Fantasy wargaming.

I do not think that Comicon is a glorified mart. I can get to know comic fans a lot better over 3 days than I can over a few hours, and that interests me more than the pros. I'm also surprised that you carry on about the lack of feeding facilities. I always take sufficient food with me, since I want to spend all my money on comics.

Steven Green's comments were also harsh, but he does have a point. Surely a group of fans could organise a convention each year, or is there a problem that they would not take the risk. In that case, only a true businessman could organize one successfully, and that is what Colin Campbell did last year.

H.M.S. Conqueror is far too Star Trek-ish for my liking. My god, even one of the officers has pointed ears. You could have been a bit more original. How about giving Lt Fl'ff a beer gut? /(And Fl'ff says, "How about giving John Murphy a punch on the nose?" Most illogical! -ML)/

Thundermole, however, was excellent, as usual. Boy, Terry Moore sure has a weird sense of humour. What's Galactapussy gonna do? Whip Thundermole to death?

Many congratulations, Mike, on your imminent addition to the family. Remember, love is when you smile after he/she tears up your Fantastic Four #1! /(How's he gonna do that with his hands handcuffed behind his back?)/

Theo Clarke Hullo Mike! I bet that you had forgotten what my handwriting looks like! /(Nope. I still have a recurring nightmare that <u>all</u> the LoCs are in either yours or Simon Booth's handwriting. What a horror!)/

I hope that you are enjoying your farewell savaging of the wisdom of fandom assembled! Is Reaction going to become a bland lettercol where people can speak without fear of public dismemberment? Will timid neofans start writing in their hordes when they realise that their innermost thoughts are no longer threatened by the acid pen of the Cruden? Whatever happens, some of us will miss you, and I for one look forward to your return. /(That was well worth the pound, Theo.)/

But, enough of this sentimentality! On with my reactions. Let's start with the comparison between sf and comics fandom. There is certainly a glaring disparity between the quality of sf cons and comic cons, but it is hard to isolate the causes. The most obvious factor is the relative difference in the emphasis placed on dealing at the cons. It seems that the main focus of Comicon is the Dealers' room, with the programme as the only alternative during the day. The wider range of activities to be found at an sf con is not organized because there is more money available, but because the fans, themselves, get involved. It costs nothing to run a games room if the fans bring their own games, and how much does it cost to run a "Mastermind" competition, or a game of sf/comics "Call My Bluff" ("what is a 'fanzine'"?!) or informal fan panels?

I am surprised that you let pass Paul Strout's observation that "the true heart of the comics "industry"...lies in fandom itself...", without comment. Let us keep fandom in proportion: we are a tiny group of intellectual snobs who reckon that "creative integrity is the thing." Our views in no way reflect those of the reading public -- if fandom tried to run the industry it would go bust in a month. I can see it now: IPC publishing Eagle (which would reduce most kids to helpless laughter), 2000AD, Starlord, Garth Weekly, an all British Marvel comic with Black Knight, Night-Raven etc, and a comic featuring The Spider, Steel Claw etc; all printed on art stock by Web Offset and costing 30p plus each! I'm sorry, Paul, but the heart of the comics industry is in the pockets of the companies' owners--and that is where it will stay.

I cannot quite grasp why 2000AD gets Reed's bad paper. I understand the bit about IPC buying all of Reed's bad stuff but why does it <u>always</u> go to 2000AD? After all, Tiger and Speed are both well-printed on reasonable paper, so why is 2000AD singled out for the crud? /(Because it's got a large fan-readership, and everyone knows that fans will put up with any old crud.)/

Peter J. Poole I'm glad to hear that H.M.S. Conqueror will go on, but one thing you say /(in a letter, not in Bem-29 -ML)/ strikes a chord--you say that all your completed scripts are "rather lacking in conflict". Now the puzzle-solving aspect of the story I've seen provides plot conflict, so I'll assume you're referring to thud and blunder fight scenes, oui? /(Ja. -ML)/

It so happens that my current pet hate is the way fan strips in general are aping the parameters of pro strips, particularly as regards the "obligatory fight scene." Personally I'd like to see fan work going in a different direction to a standard Marvel/DC story done by fans not pros--and I don't mean the excessive "tits 'n' bums" stuff some people produce to show they aren't covered by the CCA. Why can't we use the comic format to tell stories deriving their impact from good characterization, good plotting, thought out motivation etc, rather than depending on high-profile violence, super-hero dogma, and bastard offspring of old SF plots? I'd like to see fan strips experiment more. How about comic strip biographies (like the "Life of Bruce Lee" issue of Deadly Hands of Kung Fu), maybe on people like Kennedy, DaVinci, Galileo, Shakespeare, or stories of events, say the moon landing, the rise of the Ayatollah in Iran, the need to develop space colonies and fusion power sources. Or how about an accurate historical story, say the Siege of Tripoli in 1561 involving as it did the Knights of the Order of St John at Malta? Dammit, the comic format is a <u>medium</u>, it can convey more than one type of message or story, can't it? /(Yes, but it takes some doing to transcend the message of the medium, and the message of the comics medium is cursory entertainment, not education -- not even serious, cerebral entertainment. It takes even more ability to transcend the message of the medium unselfconsciously. A lot of the early seventies Marvels (the ecology-orientated issues of Iron Man and Sub-Mariner spring to mind) were not just twaddle, they were pretentious twaddle.)/

Chris Ash Two regularly-returning themes in fanzines these days are the "inferiority of comics fandom to sf fandom" and that old favourite, "fan apathy." In an obtuse sort of way, I think the two are linked. /(Move over, James Burke.)/

Firstly, if most fanzines are anything to go by, comics fandom is inferior to its sf counterpart. Because I've drawn a few silly pictures for 'zines and because my address occasionally appears in Bem, I find, from time to time, unsolicited fanzines appearing on my doormat. Presumably, in mailing these, the publishers are seeking some sort of response from potential readers. I say "potential" as, due to a combination of illiterate contributors, sloppy typing, messy printing and confusing layout, it's usually a struggle to drag the eyeballs even across the first couple of pages. And presumably, people who fail to respond correctly to these unexpected free gifts are simply displaying their apathy...rather than their good taste.

We have in this country a wonderful institution called The English Language. It is a rare product of this island which has survived the fissures of both time and space, so that English as spoken in Los Angeles and Wellington is virtually identical with that spoken in London. No other language on this planet has travelled so well or developed so concordantly in dispersion.

In my job in the City, I have frequent contact with people from Western Europe and the Far East who speak English as a second or third language; I also work with several people from the East side of Greater London. A constant source of embarrassment and perplexion is the high standard of English spoken by the former group when compared with the latter.

While I would not suggest that comics themselves encourage a low standard of literacy, the evidence of most fanzines is that they certainly appeal to a section of the reading public who have trouble in stringing a sentence together correctly, and who misspelt it when they do.

I have experience of this in reverse due to the number of times that I've been misrepresented, misinterpreted and misquoted in Reaction. Usually I don't respond to this, figuring that if people couldn't understand English the first time round, they're hardly likely to have taken a crash-course in the interim.

Anyway, one result of the above is that

I phrase very cautiously any piece of prose submitted to Bem, and attempt to cover myself from every angle. It was thus that I observed in Bem ≠28 that Starlin's contributions to Epic ≠1 "appear to have been rendered in colour but printed in black and white." The first word of the quote could indicate that the phrase is a tribute to Jim Starlin's skilful handling of monochrome nuance. I think Dean Smith, in Bem ≠29, is trying to tell me that this is, indeed, what the phrase should indicate when he notes that the chapters "were done in black and white and half-tones."

A "half-tone" is the term used to describe the negative or resultant positive image from a photographic screening process used to mechanically reproduce continuous tone in print. Obviously, it doesn't really reproduce continuous tone, merely an impression thereof. The process is used both in monochrome and colour-separation reproduction. /(This is boring, Chris.)/ The fact that half-tones were used in the production-to-print stage of the work does not automatically imply that no tones other than grey ones were used on the original artwork. However, I'm fully prepared to accept not only that Dean Smith is trying to get this point across, but also the truth of it.

I'm also (genuinely) curious as to what Dean means when he says that some of Carl Potts' Escheresque perspectives are "wrong". Two theories spring to mind--neither of them satisfactory.

Surprise was the reaction to Mike Taylor's assertion that I had somehow slighted the not-inconsiderable talents of Wendy Pini. By stating that "Pini, despite her excellent sense of design and colour, is probably a good example of someone who would never have made it into mainstream Marvel", I would have thought it obvious, from the praise and the context, whose side I was on. Not only did I carefully insert the qualifying word "probably", but the statement was phrased in the past tense, obviously referring to pre-Epic Marvel. Far from suggesting that Pini was untalented, I was condoning Epic for featuring someone other than that which Mike calls "formulated claptrap." /(What do you mean by referring to Wendy's style as "seemingly naive and simplistic", Chris?)/

Just in case Mike Cruden mentions it, when I noted that Pini's style was "seemingly naive and simplistic", the "seemingly" implied that such an observation was merely superficial, by which I meant that her figures aren't overloaded with superfluous, detailed musculature and "dynamic perspectives", as is the norm at Marvel.

Also Mike (Taylor), I wasn't suggesting that people who like pixies are mentally deficient, but questioning the desirability of that kind of sentimental and essentially insipid escapism. Personally, I find the Conan-type of fantasy just as dubious and would always prefer the more Arthurian middle ground. /(My favourite representation of Arthurian Britain was presented in Treece's "The Green Man", recommended to everybody who enjoys stirring adventure, as contrasted to the passionless Arthurian world that is usually portrayed.)/

To continue my gripe against this inability to read, it should be pointed out to C.N. Padgett that "Alchemist Supreme" is by no means "typical Metal Hurlant SF", not just because the plot is intelligible, the scripting straightforward and the artwork conventional, but because the strip was produced for Pilote.

And so to Katholicity. I'm sure some sort of collected works of KG would be a runaway bestseller (with Daily Star readers). Whatever subject she chooses to write about always turns out to be the same old chestnut (or torso-nut in her case). Her description here of the Vision as "a glorified vibrator" is as nothing to a gem she let slip in another fanzine recently. The full breadth of Kathleen's research into her favourite subject has revealed that "the erect organ of a mallard drake measures approx. ½ inch." Maybe there's something to be said for elves and pixies after all. /(Yep, I agree. All in all Kath is by far the most interesting person on the fan-scene at the moment. That is what you were saying, isn't it?)/

In closing, I hope all you guys appreciate that, now the Pistols are no more, someone is still prepared to keep practising the time-honoured Art of Provocation. And Cruden, if this thing sees print, I hope you hack it to bits. Perish forbid that you should forego your final opportunity. /(Thanks for some interesting moments, Ashers, ol' chum.)/

Nazer Alikhan — Re: review of CHEESECAKE ≠2 in Bemuscene.

Although I know it's not good practise to write in going "pooh-pooh" everytime you get a naff review (this is the first), Mal Burns' "piece" on CC2 in Bem-29 has motivated me enough to put pen to paper in defense of our baby.

Firstly, we were hoping for a mention in "Fan-Things", as CC is a "stripzine" by comic "fans" (that's us) in the same vein as AHB, SAS etc with our heads firmly into the latest X-Men, Daredevil etc, rather than Burns' decrepit, cliché-ridden underground press which is as good an alternative as Ronnie Regan, I'd say. /(Here we go with a sensible, lucid, articulate typical fan-editor's "they done me wrong" letter. If somebody writes an unfavourable review of your zine, naturally the first thing you've got to do is slag the person and his works as much as you can; decrepit, cliché-ridden etc etc. Grow up, lad!)/

Cheesecake costs 20p, not 35p. That's 20p + p&p, whereas p&p is not mentioned with the 35p and so people will think it's 35p + p&p, which is darn expensive for any stripzine, let alone one they will read described as "...there isn't much in it." 16 A5 pages? Well, excuse us if you are looking for quantity over quality, "Mal"--we couldn't afford any more pages or an A4 size--do forgive us. We are such inferior bastards for working on A5 size --sorry. /(Mal's not to blame for the 35p; in Bem, fanzine prices quoted are always postal prices, as that's the quantity of money to be sent to the address given. It would be helpful if all fanzines gave a price by post; trying to disguise the price by splitting it in two is rather confusing. Does the prospective purchaser know the cost of posting a fanzine of unknown weight? How much, if "packing" is mentioned, should he allow to cover the cost of an envelope? -ML)/

Then, Burns goes on to describe the quality of the actual paper CC is printed in--again, muchos apologios, effendi, that we could not afford to bring our standards "up" to that cheap sex trashzine Graphixus. Even "Swords of Heaven" didn't get that kind of special treatment. /(You can almost imagine him stamping his feet and beating his fists, can't you.)/

And then two paragraphs JUST DESCRIBING THE COVERS? (Where the price is written twice?)

The two strips themselves seem to be mentioned in an almost incidental manner. I know John Frankish also hates u/gs, and "The Returning" is far superior to any "alternative" (sic) publication.

So is "Mantis Prey" -- and to say the strip has "fan-art charisma" is a joke, since most fan artists seem obsessed with superficial prettiness rather than gut storytelling, mood, good drawing etc.

So Burns couldn't understand the strips --oh I see, that's your problem, is it Mal? John and I have just turned 19. We get kids of 15 writing in telling us they read, enjoy and understand our work. How old is Burns the raging intellect? An aging Hippy, I'd say.

And I don't live in Ferndale Crescent.

Why does Burns hate us? I demand an explanation for such crappy treatment. /(Pathetic, isn't it.)/

/(A feature review instead of a brief Fan-Things paragraph is hardly "crappy treatment"; I hope that, on re-reading the review, you find Mal's criticisms useful--he knows more about alternative comics and stripzines than you and I put together, after all's said and done. -ML)/

John Gatehouse — The "Fan Achievement" ballot. At first the thought of yet another Award set-up gave me a nauseous feeling; last year fandom revolved around petty awards for all manner of "achievements", the "Worst Award" set in Vertigo being the cruellest. I thought fandom had more taste than that. /(Hell, it gave you a little titter, didn't it. Harmless fun, and all that.)/

Must bring you up on criticizing the full lead the X-Men have taken in the Eagle Awards. Now while I agree other comics are worthy of such "status", notably Jonah Hex, MoKF, and Daredevil (ruined by the Ditko fill-in and origin reprint reprint reprint of DD ≠1), if fandom at large feels the X-Men are the best, why shouldn't they vote for them? I know many friends (through correspondence) who read the above titles yet still prefer the X-Men. There is nothing wrong in that. To tell people who they should vote for undermines the whole concept of the Awards, I was amazed to hear it from someone of your easy-going outlook. /(Beware; beneath that easy-going outlook lurks a harsh, savage, bestial, brutish in-look, which is what a poor letter-answerer has to contend with.)/

If the Awards are boring due to the X-Men taking all categories so be it, that's democracy for you. To want to enliven the Awards with different winners may be basically sound, but it would not be fair. For some unexplained reason fandom hates success -- hopefully not through jealousy, yet what other answer is there? /(Not success; some fans hate to see the rest of fandom going ga-ga over the latest supergroup (or writer, or artist, or comic...)/

Anyway, I hear no complaints at the success of your own Bem, which will no doubt come out on top this year (well-deserved, but watch out for Cerebro!!), so let's have none of the bitchiness the Awards bring out in fandom each year. /(Aww, c'mon. Think what a dull place fandom would be without any bitchiness! By the way, why can't Cerebro watch out for itself?)/

Catherine Yronwode — A belated reply to M.M. Forrest's query in Bem-28, re women in fandom in the US of A:

You question my supposition that there are "more women in fandom" in America than in Britain. Bem regularly implies that there are less than ten female fans in England. Now tell me--how many fans are there altogether? That is, what percentage

of British fans are women?

In my area (rural south central Missouri, a "hick" region) one local comic book shop owner estimates that 10% of his customers are women. In New York City (a thousand miles northeast of here) I'm told the percentage is higher -- 15% at least. It has been alleged that there are between ten and twenty thousand "hardcore" comics fans -- not kids or casual readers, but collectors, the kind who patronize comic shops. Thus, taking the lowest possible estimate (10% of 10,000) we get a total of 1,000 female fans in America. Using the highest estimate (15% of 20,000) we have a total of 3,000 female fans. These, again, are not merely "comic book readers" --they are active participants in fandom as well.

Another way to approach the question is to use Harry Hopkins' "Fandom Directory." This book lists names and addresses of individuals, stores, publishers, apas, cons, etc -- as well as coding them for specific areas of interest (such as "DC", "Marvel", "REH", "Golden Age", "Barks", etc). All listings are voluntary -- you must request to be included. There are around 5,000 listings this year. I picked 5 pages at random, deleted all company names and all names of ambiguous gender (such as "Chris"). This left me with 216 names--of which 22 were female. So let's say that the estimated percentage of female fans is around 10% nationwide--probably higher in big cities.

Now -- how does this compare to British fandom?

There is a very short listing in the "Fandom Directory" for England--but most of the names are those of clubs, stores, etc. I found fifteen individual names, of which one was female. However, the sample was obviously too small to be useful as evidence of anything.

Can someone research this question and publish the results in Bem?

Oh, by the way--if you want to be listed in the "Fandom Directory", it's free. Just send a self-addressed envelope with a postal reply coupon to: Harry A. Hopkins.

He will send you a form to fill out, giving your specific areas of interest. The Directory itself is a 300-page book which comes out yearly, costs £5.95, and is very useful, as you can see. /(I've also had a request to say that Jo Nichols, is compiling the 1st Edition of 'The Comic Book Collector's Address Exchange'. If you wish yourself to be included, send your name and address (and interests?) to Jo.)/

Les Chester

Marsha Forrest's comments on female fans were eminently sensible, and of course she's right about the reasons for "femfans" being so few in number. I'm sure there are some girls who appreciate comics purely as an escapist medium, but there's really nothing in comics for girls to aspire to. Apart from the sheer stupidity of (for example) a rape-inviting, half-naked (and presumably freezing) female toting a sword that most women couldn't even lift whilst apparently having no muscles other than those between her ears, Red Sonja epitomises the Marvel (mis)concept of "liberated equals anti-feminine" which is surely the antithesis of women's lib. I always understood that liberation meant women could be independent and assertive while still retaining their sexual identity; taking on some of the least attractive traits of males doesn't really produce something that girls can readily identify with.

Anyway Marsha, if you do go to Comicon this year you can share my room and I'll look after you OK. /(You smooth-talking beast! Don't take any notice of the cad, Marsha. Just to be sure you don't fall into his hot, sweaty hands, perhaps you'd better stick by me for most of the next Comicon.)/

Martin, I see in the Bem Ballot I got 2.9% from a total vote of 123; by my reckoning this means 3½ people voted for me. Was that an accounting error, or did someone suggest I was a half-wit? /(Would that it was so simple, Les. Six people voted for you; it's just that not all of them voted you their number one favourite letter-writer! -ML)/

Kathleen Glancy

Brian Bolland's Catwoman cover was absolutely brilliant. But oh dear, I'd almost rather they had killed her than saved her with such a thoroughly silly cop-out. It was a nice story up to then, neatly bearing out some of the points I made--Catwoman's basic resemblance to Batman, for instance, as she swung off on his batrope and threatened a fence in his very manner. I gather they are writing her out now -- which is annoying, but better than submitting her to the indignity of being involved in a romantic triangle with Brucie and the Pepper Potts clone. I would like to see her turn heroine, and perhaps team-up with other heroines. She has guested with Wonder Woman before -- and a team with Black Canary would be a natural, if only for the ready-made title for the story. (No, Mike, not "I t'ought I taw a puddy cat")

M.M. Forrest can't have been reading the same X-Men as I have, if she can describe Colleen's attitude to what turned out to be a non-affair with Cyclops as "non-simpering". Simpering is one of the ways--one of the more printable ways -- I would have described it. Also unpleasantly sexist. I hold no more brief for women who think of men as "hunks" than for men who think of women as "broads", and such a way of thinking was alien to Colleen's previous character, reducing her to the level of the brainless Hellcat--who, you may have noticed, seems incapable of calling men "men". She recently called New York's Finest "the hunks in blue"...

In any case, I call to witness Chris Claremont himself. In a Comics Journal interview he admitted that perhaps, in retrospect, it was a mistake to use Colleen (which is doubtless the nearest he will come to admitting that the whole idea was a load of bovine excrement). I gather Colleen is now going to fall for Bob Diamond, ex Son of the Tiger. The poor girl has no luck at all. /(This summary and only half-considered (being generous) treatment of character is exactly what makes character analysis of the type you performed in Bem-28 so questionable (but lots of fun, nonetheless). You probably poured much more thought into your analysis of Catwoman than most of the writers when they were chronicalling her adventures.)/

Maureen James

Many thanks for Bem-29, I really enjoyed the way it was a special 2000AD issue without being overshadowed by 2000AD, if you see what I mean. You hit a nice balance there.

Also, Katholicity was one of the best ever. Sometimes I think that if Kathleen and I met we'd say everything in unison--I agree totally with all her remarks. Obviously Ms Marvel's child will be something to do with a "cosmic something-or-other"; I can't imagine her dallying with anyone without taking precautions. On the other hand, I wonder if the Silver Surfer ..../(Sue, Ms Marvel...one more and I get a hat-trick! But seriously, Ms M. mentions that she never even..., and there isn't a father, so, seeing as you definitely can't catch that from lavatory seats, I'd agree a cosmic whatsis is the prime suspect.)/

And on to Sigh; I, too, think comic characters should have "rights". By all means update them, but updating doesn't mean changing beyond recognition in my opinion. Expand on the characters, yes, but keep some of the character traits they are recognized for.

And before I close I must say that Fantasy Trader is improving with each issue; a longer Whispers of Insanity would be appreciated, however. But then, perhaps people don't think of writing a LoC to FT as well as Bem or Graphic Sense. I wonder why? /(Now that the lettercol is more regular--Gez has been taking the All-Bran, y'see -- people may feel more inclined. I betcha wondering why we're discussing FT's lettercol in Reaction, eh Mart?)/ /(Yes indeed, Mickey! -ML)/

NASTY COMIX.
BRINGS YOU...
THE LAST PART OF...
THE DAY OF THE TVS
ALL OVER THE LAND, T.V. SETS WERE RAPING AND PILLAGING. THE WORLD WAS AT THE MERCY OF PROF.. TWIDDLE KNOB'S T.V.'S
"YOU FIEND TWIDDLE KNOB. YOU SWINE! YOU...
TUT TUT STICKS AND STONES.
ALL HOPE SEEMED LOST. T.V. REPAIR MAN WAS MERCILESSLY BEATEN ABOUT THE HEAD BY TWIDDLE KNOB'S EVIL PORTABLES. AND TIED UP WITH EXTENSION CORDS.
GASP.
HA HA GOODBYE T.V. REPAIR MAN.
AND SO TWIDDLE KNOB'S T.V.S SET ABOUT THEIR DIRTY DEEDS. STEALING LOOTING KILLING AND SHOOTING...
FIRST THEY WOULD BORE YOU TO DEATH WITH CROSS ROADS AND BLANKTY BLANK
ZZZZZ
SNIGGER!
AND THEN... MAKE OFF WITH ALL YOUR MONEY.
YUK YUK
LOOT.
BUT MEANLY L. T.V. REPAIR MAN STRUGGLES IN VAIN TO FREE HIMSELF.
GRUNT
HOP.....
UNFORTUNATELY, THE IDIOT RENDERS HIMSELF UNCONSCIOUS IN THE PROCESS.
AND TWIDDLE KNOB'S T.V.S HAVE COMPLETE CONTROL
"AT LAST" AT LAST MY CHILDREN THE BATTLE IS OVER... AND I, PROFESSOR TWIDDLE KNOB...
HOLD IT RIGHT THERE TWIDDLE
YEAH YES YOU FIEND
I'LL SECOND THAT!
I'LL THIRD IT!!
GASP! DO MY EYES TELL LIES OR IS IT A SICKNING BUNCH OF SUPER HEROES
SM
AND SO ALMOST INFALLIBLY THE WORLD IS SAVED AGAIN BY THOSE SICKNING GOODIE GOODIES, AND POOR OLD TWIDDLE KNOB HAS TO ROT IN PRISON.
CURSES FOILED AGAIN.
THAT'S WHAT THEY ALL SAY.
OCASTO
WHILE THE SUPER MAN AND RUBBER MAN AND FLY MAN AND SPIDER MAN AND BAT MAN, ANT MAN AND MICRO MAN AND THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN AND ALL THE OTHER HE MEN WENT OFF TO CELEBRATE THE MILLIONTH TIME THEY SAVED THE WORLD WELL ALL EXCEPT T.V. REPAIR MAN WHO WAS STILL OUT COLD.
ZZZZZ
THE END!

Simon Russell Returning home to rain-drenched Stevenage after a highly enjoyable holiday is never fun, but this time the pill was sweetened by finding Bem-29 on the mat.

The Eagle Awards: it's too late for me to vote but I read the voting form with interest. It seems to me that a choice of 3 (occasionally 4) + the "pass" is a very limited selection. Who can deny that Pat Broderick, Frank Miller and Jerry Bingham deserve to be included under "favourite artist", and what about Rudy Nebres or Gene Day as "favourite inkers"? Next year perhaps we can see a choice of five or more--and perhaps not. /(What's the point of including more than three? If the artists you mentioned had any chance of winning, then they would have garnered enough nominating votes to be included on the voting form. The fact that they did not is evidence that they are not favourite enough. And remember, we're discussing "favourite" artists, writers etc, which isn't necessarily synonymous with best.)/

More moans: Nige Edwards is complaining about "editor-apathy", citing Nige Balloch for not sending him a contributors copy of Media. There's no law that says all contributors are entitled to a free copy --many editors give complimentary copies for contributions printed, but it is in no way compulsory. If I were an editor and received a letter saying "you used my doodle in issue #69.4, where's my free copy?" I would be inclined to ignore it. /(I'd have thought common courtesy obliged an editor to send all his contributors a copy of the zine wherein their work has appeared. Y'know, just to say thank you. I always found it irritating that Richard Burton never bothered sending me the issues of CMN in which my bits and pieces were printed.)/

Nige does have a point though about Barry Winetrobe, some editors are like that--when you send off for one issue out of curiosity you usually receive a short word from the editor, explaining his policies and aims and exchanging pleasantries; some editors, however, simply bung the latest issue in an envelope and mail it off. Such silent introductions to fanzines hardly encourage subscriptions. /(Editors like that aren't likely to last very long, as it's hardly the way to turn a casual enquirer into a subscriber. I normally enclose a letter in such cases; it's polite, it's friendly, and it's also common sense! I wish I could do it with overseas copies too, but "printed matter" regulations are too strict. -ML)/

Bye bye, Mr Cruden. /(Bye bye.)/

Steven J. Green Though your reference to me in the review of Rob Hansen's zine STARFAN was undoubtedly meant as a joke, I'd like to clear up any misunderstandings that might arise in the light of my letter in that same issue.

Firstly, I am <u>not</u> against sf fans entering comics fandom, or vice versa. Rob's been in sf fandom long enough to know the rules, and I'd be the last person to try and dissuade him (why the hell do you think I produced Closer to the Edge: philanthropic egotism?). /(But of course. Why does any editor produce any zine? Why do <u>you</u> think you produced CttE?)/

Secondly, <u>neither</u> am I advocating a mass exodus into the Holy Land of sf fandom, just a quick dose of electroshock and a few minor amputations. There's life in the old corpse, yet--but only just. /(My brief excursion into sf fandom left me with an overall impression of in-joke silliness coupled with pedantic, over-serious theorizing. I was bored silly in fact. The only advantage it has over comics fandom is that the material aspects are relatively insignificant.)/

Finally, I apologise to Colin Campbell for refering to him as the "great Surrey god" and implying that he held the 1979 comicon at the NEC for personal prestige. I <u>meant</u> to say Essex.

Ivo Steyn The violence and sex were integral to the plot of "Neverwhere"? Do you really, honestly believe that, Mike? The violence: the first 30 pages (Den encountering the lizard man, the girl and the dragon) are in no way integral to the plot. The whole scene might as well have been a short story, wholly independent of the rest of the book. As for the rest of the violence, while I admit some fight scenes are indeed a part of the plot (while many others aren't, Den's second encounter with Gel being a good example) they are depicted in an unnecessarily gruesome manner. Den and Norl fighting the queen's soldiers, the queen trying to club Den to death, all these scenes are quite <u>unnecessarily</u> gory, and frankly, I found them very disruptive to my enjoyment of the book. Then there's the sex in Neverwhere. I thought the queen's seduction of Den was rather ludicrous, since he'd been fighting for his life against her troops who, during that fight, had butchered his comrade. Den must be a very weak-willed fellow if he's able to rumple the sheets with her after <u>that</u>.

The scene wasn't integral to the plot, it was pure decoration. The scene with Ard and Kath is even worse, since it totally demolishes Ard's character integrity. We have had constant reminders of his godhood/mutancy/whatever, he's invulnerable, he's an able necromancer and he's loony as a bedbug besides. Then we are asked to believe he's really just a frustrated little impotent creep, plagued by the memories of an unhappy childhood, etc. It is too much to ask.

The most damning thing about Neverwhere is the way women are depicted. Consider: Den himself is totally hairless, Kang has eyebrows, Ard has a full head of hair. Maybe the total hairlessness is caused by the dimensional journey which brought Den and Kath to Neverwhere? No, because Kath may not have any pubic hair, but a bald scalp would have made her too alien, not <u>pretty</u> enough. Ditto for the queen. I won't even go into the reason all the women have large tits (and don't start saying that's a part of Corben's style!) --let's face it, Neverwhere is just a disgusting piece of sexist shit. The sex isn't a part of the plot, it's <u>decoration</u>, pure and simple.

Marvelous colours, though...

/(Seeing as Richard Corben appears to be one of the more intelligent, committed and believable comic artists; seeing as he seems to have thought out quite seriously and deeply what he's doing, why he's doing it and how he's doing it, and seeing as he's been involved in some way in

Neverwhere for getting on for ten years, it seems somewhat cursory to dismiss the end product as a disgusting piece of sexist shit, albeit with marvelous colours. I know the intentions don't always justify the material, but don't you find anything of merit in Neverwhere's content. As for what bothers you the most, I find the violence in Neverwhere much more important and valid than the "pretend" violence in, say, Captain America, wherein a man is slammed against a brick wall only to jump up and rejoin the fray. The violence being unnecessarily gory is only your squeamish opinion. If someone smashes a very large club against somebody's head, I'd expect the head to shatter. If someone gets a kick in the mouth, I'd expect him to lose a few teeth. Regarding that first seduction scene, I inferred that Den was trying to buy his allies time to steal the Locnar. Surely the whole point about Ard is that he <u>is</u> a frustrated, impotent creep. Are you sure you're not just overreacting to seeing adult content in a comic strip. Did you find the violence in "The Deerhunter" unnecessarily gruesome, or the sex in "Coming Home"? To take another line of argument entirely, I couldn't give a damn whether the violence and sex of Neverwhere are gratuitous. Corben has successfully integrated them into an excellent story, beautifully drawn, with adult interest.)/

Nige likes Wonder Wart-Hog, he likes the Marx Brothers...sarcastic git he may be, but anyone who says he's got bad taste will have to deal with me first (he said from a safe distance).

Sue and Mike, congrats and much happiness. Does this mean Reaction will see the letters answered in 16 years' time by ...Kid of Cruden?

Daryl S. Herrick

Graphic fantasy and action, that's what attracts comic book readers to the medium for the most part. After all, not even Neal Adams can be called a master of still life art. Throw in a pinch of hero worship and you have the main motivation behind most fan publications, British or American --this doesn't mean that they should be identical, and for God's sake, they should not try to be.

Why then, may I ask, does Bem try to emulate The Comics Journal? If TCJ was failing at its task, I could see Bem trying to take up the slack, but you have little but praise for TCJ. Now we have a TCJ clone, Comic Feature, complementing TCJ in quality and subject-matter. Why overcrowd the field if you don't have to.

Lift your gaze above the hype. There are some doings in England and Europe that surpass the droll material that is turned out in America. You have the advantage that TCJ does not have, you are there where it is or has been happening.

I will give you credit for the coverage that you give Judge Dredd and Unamerican Activities. I would like to hear about the other features in 2000AD. You seem to devote little attention to these besides posting news of who is doing what and when it will appear. I hear about the legendary Dan Dare of old and the bastardization of present, but based on the coverage in Bem, I don't know who the hell they are.

What about the British comic strips? What about the original artwork done for Marvel Britain? How about the <u>other</u> British comic books and their companies? Besides scant mentions, Bem doesn't devote in-depth articles to these.

What about the legendary French comic art. I constantly hear how the French are more enlightened than us poor slobs over here in appreciation of comic art. How about some articles on it?

Another detail is foreign reprints of American material. When I was in French-speaking Quebec, I saw fine volumes that reprinted Steranko's SHIELD and Captain America, and Adams' Deadman, that I suppose originated in France. These are handsome books even if you can't read French.

Graphic fantasy and action is not an exclusive feature of comic art. You British produce damn good television action series. I am a great fan of the old Saint show, and the Avengers has a strong following in America. I didn't even know what this Dr Who everybody is raving over is about. If you are going to emulate TCJ, follow its example of not limiting its scope to strictly comic art.

You can feature comic art, but remember what makes it. Graphic fantasy and action extends everywhere in the entertainment field. What about the old British pulp magazines, radio shows and movies. I shake my head when I think of the space that you waste rehashing trite American hype.

Perhaps I am demanding a British magazine intended for Americans, filling the void in coverage that isn't filled by the existing North American fanzines. Perhaps you would rather concentrate on the imported material than on your own home-grown products, and keep on pining over Judge Dredd, who seems to be just another variation of the American super-hero, on the side. What do you and your readers think about my suggestions? /(I think I'd quite like to read the magazine you describe--but it's not the sort of fanzine that I want to publish. I don't even want to be a Gary Groth clone... -ML)/

Lilian Edwards

The most surprising element of Bem this time for me was the readiness with which you were prepared to put down your own fanzine to the greater glory of The Comics Journal. Humility is very virtuous, but isn't it self-evidently obvious that comparisons between the two, and, on a wider scale, between any American fanzine and British zines, are not only invidious but irrelevant? For one thing, Bem is non profit-making (or loss-making, as Vertigo puts it), whereas TCJ, forgive me if I'm wrong, is a commercial enterprise is it not, with resources, contacts and sheer volume of readers/possible contributors a British fanzine can never achieve. As for the in-depth articles you seem to crave, there are a number of reasons why these are more a feature of American than British zines. One of them is sheer <u>space</u> --there isn't <u>room</u> for a TCJ-type article in more than a handful of British zines, and of these only one, Bem, is currently regularly produced. Hence fan writers have little opportunity to develop skill at thesis-writing--while they have more opportunity to gather experience at writing letters, short reviews etc, since almost every zine carries these. Hence the preponderance of the latter. And before you say it, Mike, no, I don't think experience at any sort of writing carries over as a general foundation for writing any sort of prose. There is a specific technique to writing essays (as I have found to my cost at university), and it is almost the reverse of that found in writing short reviews etc. While in the latter the general idea is to choose the relevant facts out of those available and provide a concise summary, with the former one is more likely to be taking the available facts and <u>expanding</u> them with criticism, historical interpretation etc -- a much harder task.

Which brings me onto the second reason why it's harder to write long articles in Britain--there is a vast lack of what you could call "primary data", by which I mean details of artists' careers & influences, what they are currently working on, what the editorial input was to a strip etc--in other words, the elements of background to the finished product considered in an article, that are what make the TCJ articles so "perceptive" as you put it. For example I was thinking of writing a piece on Ditko's SHADE for a local zine and was going to use the facts out of Al Schroeder's article on the subject for TCJ, until I decided there was no point in essentially cobbling together a swipe of his article with a few of my opinions. In this country, the major source of American info <u>is</u> the American fanzines -- is there really any point in producing second-rate copies of something already covered adequately elsewhere? I suppose it <u>is</u> possible for a dedicated researcher to get information from America directly--though I personally wouldn't know where to start --but no way can a British writer do a Cat Yronwode and just ring up Will Eisner for a chat. The answer to all this, I suppose, is to do an article on a British topic, where info should be readily available--but in my opinion the only British output worthy of any comment is 2000AD, and Near Myths which isn't quite ready to be extensively analyzed yet, I think.

Of course the other way out is to do an article based entirely on the comics themselves, with no consideration of the external input/influences/pressures, such as Kathleen Glancy's Catwoman article. Sadly, I consider such articles not quite, but almost, a waste of time. The fact is that comics characters do <u>not</u> exist in some continuum of their own, penetrated only by their writers and artists who convey their activities to us, as Kath seems to think they do. And, for good or bad, the shape of a character's career is

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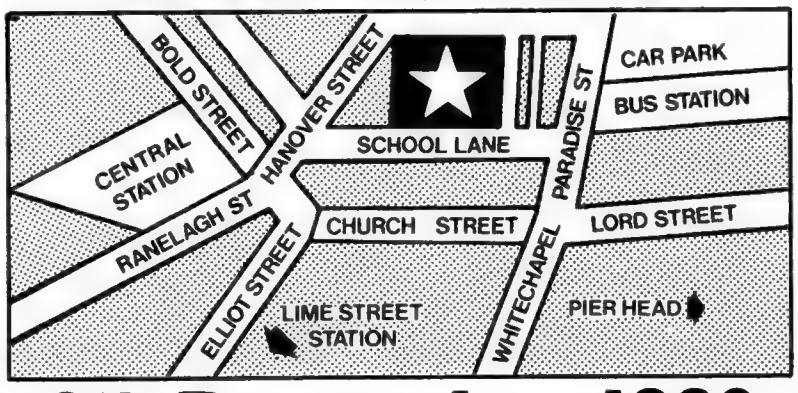

6th December 1980

1981 DATES
31st January ★ 14th March ★ 30th May
25th July ★ 19th September ★ 5th December

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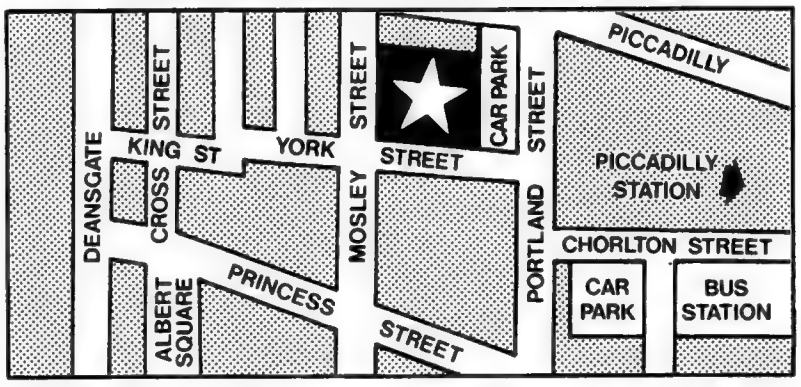

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not determined by his own psychological motivations and character, but by the demands of editors, the preferences of writers, the state of sales, etc. By all means let's have articles on Englehart's Batman or Starlin's Warlock; but an article on "The Batman" in all his manifestations from Kane to Englehart to Haney would be absurd--no such composite character exists. This isn't to say Kath's article was poor--it was a well-written, engrossing read--but such expositions are of about as much use to developing comics criticism as discussion on how many angels could stand on the head of a pin was to theology. /(Not having access to background information has not prevented the writing of some excellent articles in the past. Part of the fun is using your creativity to interpret the basic material any comic or series of comics provides. Go ahead and write your Shade article; it's opinions that make an article interesting and readable, not dry, dusty facts.

While it's true that character consistency isn't quite as tight as we fans would like it to be, at least there is some degree of consistency, and some degree of character. It's true that practically every event or development could be explained via sales or the whims of the individual writer or editors, again, it's interesting, amusing, FUN to consider the protagonist's world as real and moved by real, logical forces. Such articles do add to the lore of comics history, even if they don't add much to our critical resources.)/

David Jackson — Many thanks for Bem (the comics news fanzine) #29. It just gets better and better.

In the 2000AD interview, assistant editor Alan Grant states "When IPC comics division buys anything they buy all the rights to the artwork. The artwork doesn't go back to the artist -- ever."

In point of fact, unless the artist specifically signs away his ownership of a piece of original artwork (as distinct from the normal selling of reproduction rights), under British Copyright Law the artwork legally remains the property of the artist. Further information on Copyright Law can be found in The Writers' & Artists' Yearbook, published annually by A & C Black. And I recommend the excellent interview with Neal Adams in CMN #40.

IPC's claim to ownership of original artwork stems from the clause covering "all rights" on the reverse of their payment cheques which the artist must sign before the cheque can be paid into his account. Artists producing illustrations for IPC Magazines Division have found that if they cross out the offending clause on the cheque they still are paid, and still legally own their artwork (which has been returned by the magazine department without difficulty).

It was heartwarming to see editor Steve McManus reflect IPC concern for legal exactitudes. In cases where original comics artwork has been returned to artists for exhibition purposes and subsequently not given back to IPC, McManus threatened that IPC will "prosecute for theft". Before the untimely death of Frank Bellamy the Association of Illustrators worked on the artist's behalf for the return of all his original artwork produced for companies which were subsequently bought out by IPC. There is no legal document in existence giving ownership of the original Frank Bellamy artwork to a publishing company. The artwork is property of the Bellamy estate. IPC refuse to return any of it. /(All this business of returning art seems fraught with complications. In America comics art is shared out between writer, penciller, inker... would all that proportioning be set out in a contract? Magazine illustrating seems very straightforward compared to the complicated world of comics.)/

Chuck Connor — Read Bem-29 and felt I had to comment on it; in particular, "Unamerican Activities" and the letter from Phil Greenaway.

Let me explain something first; I am not a comics fan. There, I've said it, and you've probably stopped reading, but I also want to have a comment on your words concerning SF fandom. Yes, I'm one of those weirdo/loonie/silly SF fans, and that's why I'm going to have words with the writer of Unamerican Activities.

Does this person (sorry, but I just couldn't decypher his name) know what he is talking about when he uses the term "Sci-Fi"? Personally, I think not. The meaning is totally derogatory -- in every sense of the word. It describes hack, pulp, sub-standard and (low) down-market SF -- in fact, everything that an SF fan loathes. The writer of that piece seemed to take every chance to use this term when describing something that he either raved about or tore up for bog paper--as an SF fan I was more than somewhat confused! "Sci-Fi" is to SF as "comix" is to comics (come back "id")(not sure if that underground zine is still going).

The other point of interest was the piece on COYPU COMIX. If Mick S. could get in contact with Glen Warminger (72 Linacre Ave, Sprowston, Norwich) they could try and sort out Coypu Fandom--well, I don't think that GW's using an orthodox approach either.

Right, onto Phil's letter concerning SF cons. Jeeeeeeezus! You did have to pick out 2 of the BIGGEST conventions as your examples! SEACON '79 was 1979's worldcon, and ALBA was the UK Eastercon.

You're not talking about mere hundreds --but bleedin' farsands'a fans in one place and time. Seriously (and as an SF fan), you should look to the smaller (mini) cons before you start praising the "nationals". For a start off, SEA and ALBA were much too big and commercialized for quite a lot of tastes -- and too bloody Americanized to boot. Ask anybody from SEA what the JLAS "joke" was all about -- and they'll tell you (after picking themselves off the floor, still laughing) about Jackie L. and her "demand" for a room so she could "hold an audience" with her fans. The poor old dear burst into tears and walked out of the con when she found out how appreciative the "appreciation" society really was of her fiction.

Not having attended a comicon, I don't know if "freedom of expression" (commonly known as inane childishness) is the norm --it is for SF cons, be they National or mini.

If the committee for the Comicon is reading, and wants to find out more about the organizing of SF cons, they should contact John & Eve Harvey, 55 Blanchland Road, Morden, Surrey, SM4 5NE, and they'll give you more details than I ever could. Though don't mention my name--they're not talking to me (again). Must be something that I've printed about the BSFA (derogatory, as usual). /(And therein lies the rub. There is no committee. It's always, haphazardly, left to a hopefully enterprising individual. Perhaps what is needed is for the final event of every con to be the deciding of who is going to organize next year's con (hopefully a group of individuals, taking the job on more for

the enjoyment of it than considering what financial rewards they might get out of it), which will also have some influence on the venue.)/

And, Mike, what's this about "older and richer set of fans"? C'mon! Money-wise, we're all in the same boat, SF being worse off -- have you seen the price of books these days? The "attending"--as opposed to "supporting"--fee usually includes bed and breakfast for the duration of the con; though this is usually optional. And older? Look, I'm still 16 (have been for some years now, but that's beside the point, you're as old as you feel) -- but joking aside, you'll probably find the same age range as what's in comic fandom. /(I very much doubt it. There seems to be about four times more young teenagers around at comicons than at SF cons. And seeing as most of those young teenagers depend on pocket money rather than a salary, their financial resources are inevitably not as strong as SF fans'.)/

In parting, I'll just comment on Nige Edwards' words on fan apathy (nice to see that it's not confined to SF fandom) and fan-eds with funny (peculiar) ideas. How does he feel about a fan-ed stealing somebody's by-line? Changing fiction after the fan-ed has accepted it? Holding onto fiction copyrights until published--time delay on this bugger was two and a half years, no less. Yes, I could go on as well--that's why I've taken to publishing a zine, "In Defiance of Medical Opinion", myself. Well, why bang your head on a wall for the rest of your life? Get out there and do something about it!

Lilian Edwards — I originally started out to write a very negative, depressed letter about Bem-29, probably more influenced by my return from sunny Rhodes to drizzling Britain than by the actual contents, but even after examining it more charitably it still isn't as good as it has been lately (ie not the peak of excellence--criticising Bem is getting to be like knocking the X-Men!). Flicking through it, both Sigh and Katholicity were expansions of pretty trivial themes which had in any case been well gone over before, in the case of Katholicity as recently as (and much more succinctly in) the lettercol of Bem-26. Sigh, which I normally enjoy, could have been effectively summed up in one not-too-profound sentence, something like "continuity is generally a Good Thing". In fact the column was only redeemed by the mention of Gruenwald, who must be one of the most unjustly neglected writers around. I can't understand it--Mantlo has had blanket coverage (now turning a little sour), while the other

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new writers who are really displaying more symptoms of talent are ignored, primarily Gruenwald, but also including Macchio, Gillis and possibly even deMatteis. Mark Gruenwald turned Spider-Woman into an interesting and sensitive character, the only woman at Marvel who was both modern and believable, and whose only resemblance to her arachnid cousin was the first part of her name--and even more than that he's done for Two-In-One what Claremont did for Team-Up, supplying continuity and characterisation to all the principals in the stories, adding depth to the Thing's feelings and standard responses I never seem to find in FF. I just hope he wins the continued story Eagle, but I expect good ol' Bill's Micronauts will get it on the strength of Golden. /(Naah, good ol' Chris' X-Men will get it purely on the strength of blind fanaticism.)/

Going back to Bem, what else have we got? The interview I won't comment on, since I barely finished it due to massive ignorance of, and indifference to, British comics. I wonder if it was a good idea to run this directly after the equally large Dez Skinn interview dealing with very much the same area of business? I imagine quite a number of readers have missed out 8 or 10 pages for the last two times. The John Wagner interview was short enough to read comprehensibly, but insufferably cute--only an Ellison or possibly a Gerber can get away with that sort of ego. I liked the art though -- the only illos in the whole of Bem that made me go searching (fruitlessly) for the art credits. /(Try page 36.)/

And once you subtract the 2000AD stuff and the ever-consistent News, Fan-Things and Thundermole (bring back Blue Lamp!), plus Sigh and Kath already mentioned, all that leaves is the piecemeal Bemuscene that seemed in four pages to supply less information than one page of Worlds of Emlock (for God's sake get someone other than Chris Ash to review Epic #3 -- it really isn't something to be proud of, never to mention the actual stories, just the symptom of the blinkered artist), plus Unamerican Activities, and a curiously lacklustre Reaction. UA was the last part of Bem I read, and only then through gritted teeth; I don't know who the hell Mal Burns is, but either he writes in his sleep or he's trying to sound like he's on drugs -- I don't think I've ever seen such non-informative, stilted, uninspired prose spread over such an unjustifiably large area in a fanzine. It didn't even confine itself to pages 18 and 19, but leaked into Bemuscene and the News, with all three bits being indistinguishable in content or theme. The review of NEUTRON for example had absolutely no place in the news section, and for what it's worth I'd say Unamerican Activities has none in Bem. All I'm asking, however, is that you exercise a bit of editorial discretion and prune it, or better still return it to the reviews of the British scene it should be primarily concerned with. My impressions of this dirge of a column are best summed up by the fact that when I saw that line "continued on page 21" I was sure it was one of those hoax-lines Monty Python used to scatter through their books--I couldn't believe this river of banality was going to pour on to yet another page.

And even Reaction failed to live up to its by-now legendary reputation. While the individual letters are as well written as ever, it's currently suffering from a lack of primary focus or theme, and especially I think from the lack of extra-comical (?) activity. The most interesting debates in the past have been those basically concerning some deeper area of life--the glorification of violence, the morals of homosexuality or indoctrination. It's difficult to wax too profound on Roy Thomas leaving Marvel without becoming laughable--however, I am about to ignore my own conclusion by launching into a frenzied attack on the Eagle Awards.

To be blunt, I was aghast at the Eagle nominations, so much so I hesitated to vote. Despite all the changes of a year, almost nothing had changed. The X-Men retained their stranglehold in all departments with a passing nod perhaps to MoKF and Iron Man. Some of the voting seems almost farcical--Magneto as favourite villain, for example, when in the period under discussion he appeared in about 3 panels. Are or are not the Eagles an annual award, intended except where otherwise indicated (the Roll of Honour, and probably favourite character) to honour the best achievements of that year? And looking actually through the twelve relevant issues of X-MEN, I could not honestly say anything in them was the best of its kind published that year. This is not a denigration of the X-Men--it's just simply true surely that each year has its highlights, and in 1978 perhaps the X-Men was one of them (though even so their haul of awards was disproportionate). Going both on my own feelings and what I think the general consensus of fans and fanzines has been, the principle highlights of 1979 were the Iron Man alcoholism serial, the McKenzie/Miller Daredevil, the Black Widow Team-Up 4-parter, the Micronauts saga, and the death of Iris Allen in Flash. As near as possible, I feel the Eagles should try to reflect this outcropping of quality and, by rewarding it, stimulate more of the same. It should not be a predictable and token honour to creators who have already proved themselves and have not excelled further recently. And to come down to specifics, it's criminal that Leialoha and Golden didn't make the ballot while Buscema and Palmer did by still churning out the same old stuff, that there's no mention of Daredevil at all, and that the choice of "new title" is so lousy -- though that can't be blamed on the fans.

The whole rigid structure of the Eagles, their static categorisation, does not lend itself to the recognition of the excellence or unusual achievement. Perhaps some freefloating categories such as "most improved book" might be added, to accomodate such cases as FLASH for example, which didn't have wonderful scripting or art, but dug itself superhumanly out of a rut a decade old. And certainly something needs to be done to combat the creeping stagnation that threatens to rob the Eagles of the prestige they've gathered--my suggestion being that any winner of a category twice should be excluded for the next year (though doubtless this will raise further inequities). I'm sure there are better ideas than I've mentioned--I'd just like to see a little constructive thinking on improving the Eagle system before next year rather than complacently treating them as a sacred and immovable object -- otherwise I fear they are going to degenerate into a mockery before too long. /(Your complaint is analogous to complaining that there's just a load of rubbish in the top twenty these days. The fact that the X-Men sweep the awards annoys me as much as the fact that there are so many bland disco records in the charts, but moaning about it doesn't alter the facts one bit. Perhaps next year everybody will be so sick of the X-Men mythos that there will be a concerted vote against them. The alternative opinion of course is that if the X-Men is the most popular series, then why on Earth shouldn't they scoop all the awards.)/

And finally I'm sorry to hear of the departure of Mike Cruden. Undoubtedly his pointed interjections have contributed greatly to the above-mentioned legendary reputation of Reaction, and in a zine which has become, like it or not, the Establishment of fandom, his views have often been refreshingly radical. Hopefully we'll still see his name above the odd letter, or perhaps we'll see Mark Wordwriter's name at the end of the odd article. /(Lillian, you've just saved me the bother of composing a letter to say exactly the same myself, under a pseudonym of course. And what a brilliant deductive mind you've got, identifying the secret identity of Mark Wordwriter. I'm pleased to notice that reading all those Batman comics wasn't an entire waste of time for you.)/

mat coward

The first thing i read was Thundermole, which was the best yet -- particularly the last panel. Glad to see it on a full page. And then the meat of the issue; the interview with the two IPC yes-men. I don't read 2000, but i thought the interview was fairly interesting until page 15, when it completely disintegrated into those two idiots babbling about artists "stealing" their art from IPC. Much more interesting, and worthy of a longer feature, was "John Wagner Reveals All", with the quote of the year about "caped creeps mincing about in leotards" and the sticking of heads in ovens.

Speaking of which, i really can't understand the current hysteria about the X-Men. I think, and always have thought, that it's rather a silly comic, at worst boring and at best no different from any other super-group book. I've been reading it recently, because of John Byrne who i think is doing some of his best work since DOOMSDAY + 1 here -- £135 especially is wonderful art--but it's a pity that Chris Claremont can't keep up with it. Lines like "I think it best not to get involved. I'll simply create an illusion that i'm part of the wall and wait to see what happens", and "She was like this when she saved the universe", prove that the "Good heavens, you're the same colour as the wall" syndrome doesn't just apply to old and obscure comics by minor publishers.

Back to Bem--and Unamerican Activities has become a really useful guide, with proper reviews rather than just listings. Incidentally, the quote about Freud and the Glasgow Empire is normally credited to Ken Dodd.

Other than that, the best item was Paul Strout's review of the Twinkies ad. A very good idea, nicely carried off. I bet those things are disgusting!

Finally -- have you noticed the ad for FUN AND GAMES with the line "Super Heroes is a trademark co-owned by the Marvel Comics Group"? Any idea what that's all about? /(Marvel and DC between them are claiming "super heroes" as a trademark; unless anyone contests this claim, it means no other publisher, or for that matter no unlicensed toy company, can make use of the term. -ML)/

Sadie McStrap

What's going on? Just when I decide to write in to let you know what I've been up to (or rather, what my friends have been up to) you decide to leave. If I didn't know better, I'd swear you had something against me, just like the good old days. Congratulations on the forthcoming happy event, by the way, and upon the birth of your next baby. How many does that make it now, or are Clark, Lana,

Bruce and Lois (I still think some of those names are kinda strange, even if a bit familiar, somehow) still your little secrets. Anyway, I'll get to the point (yes, it takes me a little longer these days); you'll never guess what I've been doing for the last two years, apart from the usual, of course. You remember the last time you saw or heard from me was at the London 2-Day Con two years ago. Well, at the end of that busy, busy weekend (you comic fans are so full of energy) I got talking to a certain fan whose name I've promised to keep a secret. You know how a cultured accent always turned me on, well this guy has one of the most refined I've ever heard. I was also intrigued by all this talk of what an interesting Bum, or something that sounded like that, he had. One thing led to another, then another, and then another. Well, I hope I'm not giving anything away when I tell you that he's got the cutest little tail-ender I ever did see. He's been such a demanding person, in the nicest possible way of course (and so polite with it) that I've hardly had time to turn around, well only just. Sadly, all good things must come to an end (he certainly did, and what an end!), and so did my good times with the lovely man. Did I ever mention how much I hate the name Maureen?

Love and kisses. /(Your editor should explain that Miss McStrap is a long-time friend of Mike's, whose letters used to appear in Fantasy Trader before Michael transferred his lettercol-rigging talents to Bem. I hope Mike <u>meant</u> to include this apparently private missive with a batch of answered letters he returned... -ML)/

Ian Abrahams

Well, it appears that finding Bem in my letterbox is enough to prompt a return to comics fandom by me, a place where I haven't been since January of this year. It also, naturally enough, has given me the inspiration to start collecting comics again, also something which I gave up in January. Not that I ever had much of a collection but, as might be expected, the only bits I sold (books & fanzines) I now find I need. Such is the foolhardiness of giving up a collection! Doubtless Bem readers would be able to give some philosophical reasons why many fans decide they need an eight-month (or more) break with their hobby before they gain a second wind; me, I'm too busy re-organising to have a couple of hours to spend defining the answer. Still, one day... /(Perhaps the break gives you the chance to step back from the hobby and examine whether you really enjoy it, and whether you miss it. I remember cutting out comics for 6 months or so, and found myself unable to keep away, mainly through sheer curiosity. Admittedly, and stupidly, it was during the Golden Age of the Marvel Age (the end runs of Astonish, Suspense, Strange Tales, the Kree/Inhumans etc FF saga) when a lot of interesting things were happening. Thank God it didn't cost an arm and a leg in those days to catch up on what I missed.)/

The Fan Awards I support in theory, but with several restrictions, i.e. that <u>no</u> fanzine distributes the flyers & ballots, but that it is left to shops and dealers (which would still presumably mean that a ballot would reach every hard-core comic fan), as this would totally eliminate bias. Why not enlarge upon the awards, maybe even an award for "fairest dealer"? I think the principle of the idea is sound, despite my half-inclination to agree with comments about awards made by David Gerrold in Starlog a while back. The awards themselves were basically agreeable, especially Ogre. /(Dealer distribution is a good idea, but not to eliminate bias. Bias is what persuades a fan to vote for his favourite whatsis, anyway. "Fairest" dealer will also boil down to "favourite" dealer, but nevertheless could prove an incentive to some dealer to deal better.)/

I must say I totally disagree with Phil Greenaway on a Trans Atlantic Fan Fund. In my view the TAFF is pointless, no good --take it away! Seriously, instead, why not raise the money, but use it to help fan-eds who have published a couple of issues of a fanzine and are having trouble financing another, although this would have to be rigorously controlled. How about a blanket organization for fandom along the lines of the idea I believe Mike suggested a while back, i.e. membership automatic to all fanzine readers. It could also organize its own fanzine distribution, thus aiding fan-eds who can't travel to the comic shops to sell their wares. What would be required would be a fan in the London area (others elsewhere) who would be prepared, for a small fee, to take fanzines to the comic shops, and thus help save fanzines not getting enough distribution. Come to that, why don't fan-eds organize their own co-operative to aid each other? /(A sound idea; all it needs is someone with sufficient nouse to organize it. However, I would object to some central fund being used to finance a failing, self-indulgent fanzine, and presumably it must be self-indulgent if it's not succeeding.)/

Re: this thing about TCJ's articles. Okay so TCJ is a great <u>magazine</u> (note my emphasis) and publishes articles like we should be seeing within our, admittedly more limited (in numbers), fan movement. However, I will always maintain that if you want to read <u>real</u> fan-type articles, you should check out issue 3 of Collectors Dream, and read the continuity articles! Furthermore, how come ewe don't have anything in UK fandom along the lines of 'Wordworld'? /(What's a Wordworld? And I would prefer to read "<u>real</u> fan-type articles" in Bem.)/

With regard to Mike's support for the idea of a "vastly inflated fandom", does this not imply that we would have more fans requiring copies of a fanzine than a small-time editor would be able to adjust to, involving therefore a <u>large</u> financial outlay to print enough to meet demands. Surely the majority of fanzines lose at least a double-figure sum every issue? The danger would be that a doubling of readership would mean doubling the loss, and therefore cancellation of smaller projects. /(The reason why most fanzines make a loss is that the circulation is too low to cover the costs. Any print run less than a thousand will inevitably make a loss. Over that figure there's a possibility of a profit, with the possibility increasing the larger the print run.)/

Amazed to see Fan-Things telling readers not to support fanzines advertised! The reasons are to an extent logical, but again picture the small fan-ed and the outlay he has made on adverts. /(Just an attempt to instil some responsibility. With the best will in the world, not every fanzine planned is actually printed --and if a precious postal purchaser of fanzines encounters a KIDZ STUFF or (new) MORPHIOUS, he could be turned off the idea entirely, which hurts everyone. There's no way a first issue can expect significant advance orders--time your ad to be in the issue your zine's reviewed in, or just treat it as an advance announcement that METAMORPH (say) is coming. By the way, Lew Stringer has just invested in a pair of kneecap protectors... -MC/ML)/

Neil Jackson

I hope you stick to 40 pages for the time being and concentrate on brightening up the interior. Most of the feature logos are boring, as is the page layout, with its enormous blocks of type broken only sporadically with spot illos. The worst example of this was the McManus & Grant interview, where it was at times very difficult to follow who was talking. I realise you're trying to fit as much in as possible, but there is a danger of saturation. /(There's also the necessity of making Bem interesting to leaf through in order that the curious browser will not only pick it up but even buy it. And the way to do that is to have a few more illustrations like that on page 7.)/

It made a difference to see 2000AD being given a good panning rather than the mass adulation fanzines are giving it. My major dislike of it from its inception has been how derivative it is, of television and film among other things.

Another thing regarding fandom's attitude to 2000AD is their sudden discovery of British comics. You're probably most guilty of this Martin, by introducing "Made In Britain". I've been reading British comics pretty solidly for 14 years and feel that most are as good as their American counterparts. One of my favourite comics stories of all time is "Ann All Alone", which appeared in Bunty. /(You read Bunty, Neil, really? Bunty? Whoops, that question sounds like it came from the "You read <u>comics</u>?!" brigade.)/ It was a really great soap opera, really heart-rending. I loved it; I only wish D.C. Thomson would reprint it. My favourite comic comic is Sparky, which featured "Puss 'n' Boots" and "We Are the Sparky People", both of which were remarkably adult in humour. I still enjoy "Skid Solo" in Tiger, because of the excellently paced driving sequences; the recent death of Sparrow Smith would be being sold at extortionate prices if a similar thing happened in an American comic. I'm also saddened by Steve McManus' remarks about "Hot Shot Hamish"--that story is a lot of fun, and is very well drawn. Tiger isn't good fiction, but there again 2000AD isn't good fiction; very few comics are.

A little while ago when I was talking to my psychiatrist (Honest!) I happened to mention that I'd been reading a lot of American comics lately. He became very interested and started making Werthamesque statements like "They show women with big breasts, don't they." I got the distinct feeling that he'd never read a comic in his life; I had to explain all about the different types of comics to him, and about censorship. His attitude appeared to confirm a lot of fans' expectations of Dr Wertham. /(I think Wertham had a lot of justifiable complaints way back in the mid-fifties, with lots of gory, sick violence and Corben-type women gracing their pages. However, in these progressive eighties, comics (most, at least) are a lot more responsible about violence, and the sex content is minimal compared to what we're surrounded with in every other medium. I suppose comics being a children's medium makes a difference, but children aren't isolated from the rest of society.)/

I don't know why, but I'm never able to write cheerful letters to fanzines. Perhaps I'm just going off comics, there is no longer a comic I await eagerly. I'm sick of the mercenary aspect of fandom. My current attitude to buying back issues is to buy as many as I can now before they go up in price even more. I can't get worked up over comic characters--I'm even getting critical of The Spirit, shock horror. /(But there'll always be Bunty, Neil.)/

MARVEL STRIKES BACK!

AN INTERVIEW WITH BRIAN BABANI (MARVEL BRITAIN'S MANAGING DIRECTOR), ALAN McKENZIE AND PAUL NEARY (MARVEL'S MAIN EDITORS, FEATURE EDITOR AND ART EDITOR RESPECTIVELY)

CONDUCTED & TRANSCRIBED FOR BEM BY ADAM PIRANI

AP: First of all, I want to ask why you asked me here to interview you?
BB: I'll tell you why. Every time I see your magazine, there's lots of mentions of Marvel this, and Marvel that, and Marvel the other, but there's never ever the official word of Marvel in the thing, which almost seems to us like we never get any right to reply...I dunno; I see people ripping us to pieces in it, I see ex-members of our staff having a go at us, I see people mainly criticising the product that we put out --I don't think you hear anything too positive about the stuff that we do in it.
AP: Is there anything in particular you wanted to reply to? I have a copy of the most recent issue of the magazine. Go ahead.
BB: Such a wonderful thing it is. How many do you sell of this?
AP: I dunno.
BB: That makes two of us.
AM: I think it's about 1200 actually.
BB: To the afficionados. Let me start again. Some of the news that you print in this magazine is from our side of the subject not strictly correct. And this is a question of how things are construed. Take Dez Skinn, for an instance. The truth was, we came to a parting of the ways. We came to a situation where our senior and junior staff at Marvel were disenchanted with the way he was running the studio, and the outlook of the product. The sales were not as satisfactory as we had hoped. New ideas and innovations were very difficult to put through if they weren't Dez Skinn new ideas and innovations. That caused a parting of the ways, and he ceased to be a member of our full-time staff, and became a consultant, which led to him leaving the offices, having nothing more to do with the day-to-day running of the company, and giving me a chance to make Paul Neary the head of the studio, put Alan in charge of the editorial content of the monthly magazines, and give all the younger people a chance to, basically, do their own thing. There were a lot of ideas, good ideas, that were being suppressed; there were problems with production, there were all sorts of personality clashes now and again, and it just came to a situation where something had to give. So I took the decision, as only I can take that decision. Dez became a consultant, because that's what he wanted to do, that's what I wanted him to do, and he started to package material outside of the building and bring it in to us. Even that didn't prove to be terribly successful, and eventually I decided that it would be best that he severed his connection with Marvel, and we mutually agreed this was the best course to follow. The impression that is always given in the trade magazines is that Dez decided to sever us, whereas the truth is that we mutually agreed to sever our connection. I'm not saying that we severed him, but I am saying that if we didn't want him, he wasn't going to be hanging about, so it was a mutual and joint decision. We are a little disturbed about the fans, the hardcore people that read your magazine, gaining the wrong impression, and being made to feel as if the constructive, artistic core of our company has been torn out by Dez leaving us. All I can say is that since he has left us, there has been harmony, happiness, increased production, no print dates missed, no ads cocked up, no fallouts with our advertising agents, no trouble with our printers, and I am pleased to say that it seems that Marvel's sales, rather than being hit by the general recession in the market, have in fact gone forward to better figures, and I'm pleased about it; I think that we're all pleased about it. I think you can take one title, which is the title that Dez himself gave birth to, STARBURST. Unfortunately, while he was in total control of it at Marvel, our sales were diminishing away to a time where we sat down here, all of us, cut the colour work, cut the feature work, literally were cutting the magazine to pieces, in the hope that if we let it go on another couple of months we could then rejuvenate it further down the line and keep our break-even as low as possible, so as to give us that chance to freshen the thing up. When Dez left, and total editorial control went back to Alan McKenzie, and the artistic control was in the hands of Paul Neary, and the management decisions were wholly and totally mine as opposed to any form of committee decision being taken, etcetera, the sales of STARBURST have done nothing more but go up rapidly month by month. I think it is now accepted as the true sci-fi fantasy fanzine, one might say. The letterbox at Marvel is crammed with far more positive letters from people happier with our output than, as before, telling us that we were nothing more than a pale shade of the US operation; which hurts us, because we're not the US operation, we are an independent subsidiary company who can do and act as we please as long as we are showing a profit. What we try and do is to take the Marvel characters, not truly to anglicize them, because I don't think the kids want it anglicized, but we do put it into a format that's printable, at a reasonable price, to allow us to go out onto the bookstalls at the same kind of price as the opposition; that's all we want, that's all we do. We try not to rip the stuff to pieces. I can't afford to print it in colour; they can go and buy the American editions if they want it in colour. We're trying to encompass a more general audience, which will distil down to the hard core fans as they get perhaps a little bit older, and wean off us onto the American product itself. And remember,

the sale of a US Marvel comic, as much as the sale of an English Marvel comic, puts money into Marvel's coffers regardless, and that's the whole attitude of the company. We don't like to be sniped at, as we do seem to be sniped at, frequently, by all sorts of people, maybe our past artists, or past scriptwriters, without turning around and saying "Everything these people are saying can well be true, but the proof of the pudding is that the stuff is selling better than it ever has done before", and that's the idea.
AP: I think generally that making a profit for Marvel isn't actually what Bem readers are interested in.
BB: I can accept that, but they have to accept where we are coming from as well. The basis of this business is not just to turn over to create expenses, to throw out product that a small hard core of fans want to read. What this business is here for is to try and, I would suggest, hook in to our stuff more and more IPC and DC Thomson readers. I think it's as simple as that.
AP: But the fanzines will always concentrate on that small part of the business.
BB: Fair enough; and I accept their criticism. Believe it or not, we even adapt and adjust to their criticism. The answer at the end of the day is we're going to put out the best value that we can for the money that we charge, the cover price of our magazines. We pick up new readers constantly, and we've come through a probationary period vis-à-vis the Americans allowing us to be a business as an independent entity; we've proved ourselves, and we'll go on from there. We have plans to do things other than Marvel comics and superheroes per se, but at this moment in time I can't disclose what those things are going to be until we're back from America. But you'll be astounded. I'm astounded; so you should be astounded. And no doubt we'll be damned to hell and back for what we're going to do, but we're still going to do it. We're still going to try.
AP: In terms of what people like to read in fanzines, do you have any response to what, for instance, John Wagner is saying?
BB: What, where it says "John Wagner Reveals All"? ((a pause, while he reads the interview from Bem-29)) Well, I think I have to say to Mr Wagner first of all that we're not in financial difficulties at all. We work on a cost per comic, or cost per magazine. We were paying Wagner and Mills so much money for their lead script on Doctor Who that it brought the break-even on Doctor Who to a very high number of copies, and what we realised is that there is not a true, general audience for a Doctor Who weekly comic. There is a hard core of Doctor

Who fans who went out regularly and bought the weekly comic, but not enough to sustain the continued progress of the weekly, and all the costs that are accrued by making it. So what we've decided to do is to make Doctor Who a monthly magazine which will appeal more to that hard core of fans, because again we're reacting to our mailbox on that. The children, the younger children who are the hard core of our normal weekly comics, like Spider-Man etc, don't really want Doctor Who at all; they only turn to Doctor Who when it's alive and on TV, and in front of them, and they forget it as soon as it dies on the television. So we're taking it again, more up-market, more to the fans. We were not making money on the Doctor Who comic alone, and the way we account in this company is that each comic stands or falls on its own merits. We do not take our whole company overhead and run things to make no money. There is a hefty royalty to the BBC on the thing, there are payments to be made to Tom Baker and others, and at the end of the day, when you put Mr Mills and Mr Wagner on top of it all, plus the creation of artwork packages to the level of excellence that the BBC requires for Doctor Who, it was just not a weekly viable proposition--but it will be a monthly viable proposition, and it will be around for a long time as a monthly.

AP: How did this result in Mr Wagner and Mr Mills no longer writing the comic?

BB: Well it just got too expensive for us. They came up here, as I remember. Did we ask them for a 50% cut? I hardly think so. Tell us the truth, Paul.

PN: The position that I was struck with was that because of the falling sales on the thing, we had to cut down on the outlay that we were making for each particular issue, so we looked into ways in which this could be done, and in the case of those two they had elected themselves into a fairly small minority of people who were getting paid over the odds as far as the others were concerned. That's not to say that I felt that they were too highly paid for what they were doing necessarily, but they were more highly paid than other people who in that particular case I felt could do the job in something like the same style. I don't mean similar style creatively, but as good quality.

AP: Do you feel that you've succeeded in the replacement?

PN: I didn't actually want to replace them, I mean we're getting a bit further into the thing than the discussion as it stands needs, but as a matter of fact, I felt that the Doctor Who stories that they were writing weren't particularly the direction that I wanted it to be steered in anyway. So in view of the fact that they were costing us a lot of money I did try to talk to them and go to the length of asking them if they wanted to work for the same money as the others. If they had said that they would do this, then I would have spoken about the new direction I wanted it to take. Because they wouldn't accept what they took to be a cut in money and what I took to be offering them the same money as everyone else, because they wouldn't do that then I spoke to Steve Moore about it and we took the thing into an entirely different area, and the area that I wanted it to go into was whereby you were getting Doctor Who stories for the Doctor Who comic, instead of a space opera in which Doctor Who was included.

BB: I also take umbrage with the way Wagner says in this interview "Marvel's next launch will be all reprint...more crap". The answer to that is, well these guys amaze me. I mean these guys are all very well at ripping things to pieces and being totally uncreative and unhelpful about it, but the answer is that there are a lot of highly skilled people here, who are pulling reprint material from US Marvel comics. Now those original US Marvel comics are normally hailed to be the "state of the art" of the art. And yet somebody like Mr Wagner comes along, and because we're using it as reprint material in the UK, although it's probably being used for the first time here, he states that that is "more crap". I don't see how he comes to that kind of conclusion, and I really don't think it warrants, to be honest, any more thought or any more discussion. I don't understand.

AP: Well, it could be said by a fan that this was "more crap", because he has already read the original comic.

PN: Let me add to that. One thing that surprises me very much about the mailbag that I get, or that I have got, since I was put in the position of editor, is that I get a lot of letters that I fail to understand. People write to me, when I'm putting out a comic that's deliberately aimed at a 9 to 14 age group, and I get a 16 or 17 year old writing to me, telling me what I'm producing is rubbish, it looks like it's produced for a 9 or 10 year old ...when the thing is produced for a 9 or 10 year old, and if this fellow's 16 then he should be buying and reading the US Marvels. What I fail to understand is the way that people will attack something that is clearly not meant for them.

BB: We suffer harsh judgement. Do you understand where we're coming from?

AP: I think that the fan press ignores Marvel to a large extent because the stuff that you produce is for the 9 to 14 age group.

BB: Well, quite rightly so. And I'll tell you something; to be honest, the fan press should ignore us, and we should ignore the fan press. But we can't. Because, from what I see, from what you've shown me here, we're sniped at continually. We're not ignored. There are reviews of our merchandise in this thing, and where there are reviews that certainly aren't going to help any sales to your fans, to your readers, because they're continually ripping us apart, because, as I say, ex-editors, ex-script people, ex-art people always seem to have an axe to grind, shall we say, against us, that we're sitting here today. I'd much rather not be, because I don't think we have too much in common, to be honest, other than what I said in the beginning.

AP: That brings me onto something else I wanted to ask, which is why doesn't Marvel use its resources to create an alternative marketplace to IPC and 2000AD in England?

BB: We are. We will, let me put it that way. I think that what needs to be understood is how we started here. Originally, Marvel Comics UK Ltd was run in Sevenoaks with a team of young people who were strictly stripping in reprint material, and putting them out, and hoping for the best. It wasn't too professionally organised, and it wasn't too professionally distributed. Over the last two years, the management has got more professional, the art and editorial direction has got more professional. We've gone through traumas, troubles, finding our feet, trying to find an identity, because what we are looking to do is to be the third force of comic publishers out there on the bookstall, and to try and give the kids a viable alternative to Beano and Dandy, and Whizzer & Chips, and Judge Dredd and all the other stuff that is poked out, and it's the same old stuff that comes out, time and time again. There's one thing that we do know that we have, although people seem to say it's "crap". We know that we have the "state of the art" art in the business. There's no getting away from it. You can't get better than Buscema, you can't get better than half the other people who are producing the art for our comics. You can't get better scriptwriters than we're using. We now have a policy of non-interference in the artistic merit of Marvel comics that we receive over here from the States. All we are doing is trying to find logical vehicles for the superheroes, and for anything else we think may be commercially viable. We're trying to give the best value for money that we can. We're not looking to slaughter the market and carve it up, and put cheap stuff out; we are not looking to put out fifty titles a week, which we could easily do, believe it or not, and I'm sure most people in the fan area do realise that we have such vast resources of material we need not turn to any English artist or any English scriptwriter, and could just go ahead and bung out any old rubbish that we wanted to, and literally call it "rubbish", and still sell it, and still get a sale for it, because we've now got our distribution pattern in a true professional and logical fashion. Comag, who are our distributors, now have professionals selling our material, selling our magazines, and they're doing a good job with it. Ergo, all the up-turns, as opposed to down-turns, in the sales and stuff we do. We are, I think, more adventurous than any other comic publisher that's around at the moment. We launched Forces In Combat because we thought that kids wanted a war-orientated comic book. We read our mailbag and found out that they wanted the science fiction and fantasy element, and not the Donner und Blitzen, "knock down the German" type usual IPC feel for the second world war, so we'll end up taking the sci-fi and fantasy element from Forces In Combat, using the knowledge that we've earned. We didn't make any money out of Forces In Combat, we used it as a research tool primarily. Had it been a success, all well and good -- everyone gets a slap on the back. But at least we can say that we learn, not from our mistakes, because they are not mistakes, because we go in knowing that if it's going to be a failure, at least we'll learn something from it. But we're learning for the 9 to 14 year olds, not for the hardcore comic fan.

AP: Do you have any intention of moving into a market that might include the sort of people who read Bem?

BB: Yes. Now let me just give you a little bit on that. We are at the moment working out 1981's roster of product. We have 3 new weeklies up our sleeves, we have 3 new monthlies up our sleeves, we have some specials that we'll bung out into the marketplace to just see if we can titillate the fancy of all the older readers, your fans. I think we will probably be able to keep one or two of those weeklies, maybe one of the monthlies, and maybe turn one of the specials into a monthly. We are aiming directly, primarily with one of the weeklies, at the 2000AD type situation, but I don't think that 2000AD goes far enough for the fan either, it goes fine for the 9 to 14 year olds, and they like the comic, and it does well. I think it's true to say that we feel in general that even that's dropping off now. From the information we get on circulation it's beginning to go over the hill. Bearing that in mind, we think we have a more viable and adult package coming through, that those people will be able to pick up, like any 9 to 14 year old, and enjoy it on another level, which is one of the joys of science fiction in the first place.

AP: Will there be any increase in the amount of original material produced in this country?

BB: We are hoping that now we've found a happy balance with our weeklies and monthlies on the reprint side of the things, that we will be able to go back into the art and script market of the United Kingdom, utilizing the best, because we only like to use the best, and I would even class Wagner and Mills amongst the best. If they want to work for us, and the money's right, I'm sure they will, because they seem to have no compunction about who they work for. We'll no doubt go out against IPC in an onslaught against that area of the marketplace. I can't really go into it any further, because it's involved with some licensed characters and some other things.

AP: Do you have any feedback on that from people in England who are professional comics creators?

BB: I think the answer to your question is, we haven't really put the word out into the marketplace, into the art and script area, because we want to talk specifics. When all the contractual difficulties are ironed out in America, which they will be next week ((first week of September)) when Paul and Alan are there with me, and because we're talking purely of specifics, once we let the cat out of the bag, to whomsoever we want to script whichever comic or magazine we're talking about, or the art side of things, everyone will know, because it's a very small and involved group of people who all talk amongst each other who I know will get turned on by the projects that are coming through. There's one that we've got up our sleeve that'll be along not too far in advance, and if it does work will be a situation where the United Kingdom Marvel company reverses the normal trend of things with the US Marvel company, and will be producing a comic both in the UK and then for distribution in a US format for America. And then probably on to all the licensed comics publishers throughout the world, because the basis and theme of it is football, soccer, and it's an outlandish kind of treatment, and I can hardly contain our enthusiasm for it. I mean that's just one of the things we're--shall I tell them any more? Why not? What the hell. It's so unique that nobody could rip it off. Could they rip it off? Wagner and Mills could rip it off! ((laughs)) They're talented people. We were approached by a group of independent--you see I don't think people realise that Marvel material is published not just in the UK, but in Germany, Italy, Holland, Spain, and all round Europe and through South America as well. Now, apart from the Americas, all those companies are in fact independent, they're large comic publishing companies who as part of their weekly or monthly line take material from Marvel and produce Spider-Man and the Hulk etc, though they're not really as creative as we are -- or hope to be in the future, because it's just another thing that they're doing; some of them, they're doing Zorro weekly comics back to back with Spider-Man weekly comics, which is a situation I don't think we'll ever find ourselves in, having Disney characters vying with our own.

AP: So you are intending to go into the market of original British material?

BB: Yes, we'll be back creating original Marvel artwork, and original scripts, and it will happen towards the early part of 1981, and they will be outlandish, and amusing, and they will not be the kind of thing that we could pull for reprint. It's a whole fresh, new approach to the market.

AP: What sort of effect do you think this will have?

BB: I think it will astound our normal readership, because it astounds me, and I'm pretty normal. I think it will upset the powers that be at IPC and DC Thomson, I think we're going to give everything an element of -- it's a cliché to say sort of "with-itness", it'll be up to the moment, shall we say. I think the biggest selling magazine in England of the fan, the fashion type stuff, is Smash Hits, right, with the punk type element of music to it and all the other stuff. I'm not saying that we're now going to do a punk music paper because we're not, that's not our scene, but what we will do is we'll make everything a little more exaggerated, a little more outlandish and maybe even a little satirical, and yes we're aiming for the older, campus type audience that really made Marvel in America in its heyday, and I think we'll be successful. And if we're not, this time next year we'll sit down here and discuss all my mistakes. They won't be with us, by the way, because they're just as responsible as I am, but they don't have as good a contract. Probably Wagner and Mills'll be sitting there... Carry on.

AP: What overall effect do you think you'll have eventually? Will anything happen at IPC and DC Thomson?

BB: We are number three just by the numbers of monthlies and weeklies we put out and the kind of distribution pattern that we have, but it's a smaller number three to a vast number one and a vast number two. When you look at IPC, they seem to be able to do things with their comics in the circulation area that we can't ever hope to have the strength of. They've got newspaper and circulation reps going round all the time, and Comag don't have those facilities, don't have that number of men, don't have that much clout. What we can do though is keep giving them a fresh outlook and a fresh approach and something new to sell, which, like I say, it's a good country, if things take off, they take off, and if they don't take off, we kill 'em stone dead. I want to see Marvel become more of a force, more of a danger to the complacency of IPC and DC Thomson. We're not going to put out any Bunty here for the simple reason that we just don't believe in Bunty. That's already been done; you couldn't do it better. So why do Bunty here? But we can sure as hell do 2000AD better than Mills & Wagner can ever write it. And I've told them that, that's probably why they don't like me. Do you think that could be?

AP: I think it's possible.

BB: I think that's possible. I can't understand why everybody dislikes me. I'm a nice person! Nick Landau never used to like me, did he? He does now. You see, nobody knows me. If they don't know me, or they've met me for 15 minutes, and the phone is ringing and I'm busy, and some guy's trying to explain to me why he's worth twice as much as any other scriptwriter's worth, what the hell input can I put into him, especially when one of them is a miserable Scotsman. I got the other one laughing once. Who's the other one? Which one's the Scotsman? Wagner's the Scotsman? Nobody knows, you see, they've got--this is all bullshit--these two, I think that one is Mr Cohen, and the other one's Mr Levy, and they work a double act, they call themselves Wagner and Mills, and one's Wagner one week, and one's Mills the other week. Nobody can tell...I think I just put us out of business. ((laughter))

AP: What is your general attitude to fans and fandom and the fan press?

BB: I love it. I'm a fan. But I'm not a fan of comic books, because I make my living out of them, and I care too much about them to be a fan of them, as you can probably understand. I've been to a lot of comic book conventions in the States, and a few in the UK; I get a kick from the way the comics are bought and sold again and again. I don't think the dealers rip off the fans, otherwise they wouldn't still be in business, and I think the fans accept that there's a marketplace for them to get involved in, and it's a whole big hobby. Their money is being invested fairly wisely; when they get the hang of the situation, it can be manipulated fairly well. I can take personal satisfaction in the fact that everything we've launched in the 2 years we've been running Marvel in England is now worth some substantial money for the early issues. The first issues of Forces In Combat will, in years to come, be worth fortunes, because it's such a lot of rubbish. It was one of our biggest disasters ever, and I think Wagner probably has issue 1 hidden away somewhere in a vault. He'll bring it out at an auction when he's 58, and he'll probably get seven quid for it. And I'll buy it.

Fan-Things

SUPER ADVENTURE STORIES ≠5 50p by post from M.J. Gibas,

for 36 A4 pages) contains a full-length Red Dragon story by Jonny Kurzman & Michael-Jan Gibas; the character has been in previous issues, but with 32 pages to play with the effect's much stronger. It's an engrossing, complex tale put together with style and confidence; it makes this the best SAS yet.

FACTOR-X ≠2 costs 25p plus an S.A.E. from John D. McKay,

for 24 A5 pages, 19 of which are devoted to strips --new editor Captain Flemn is obviously a genius, and conducts a friendly lettercol (give or take the odd maiming), so I can only suggest you give it a try if you go for stripzines. Refreshingly off-beat!

However, just an s.a.e. (sent to Alan Craddock,

will bring you 8 A4 pages of GODCHILD, an SF strip with art of the very highest quality. A lot of work has gone into this; it was worth it.

RABBITS TEND TO EXPLODE ≠3 15 A4 pages for 3 10p stamps from Dave Haden,

has some trenchant remarks to make about comics fanzines and fandom; and RTTE is indeed a suitable antidote, encompassing as it does Rupert Brooke, "The Archers", astrology, apas, and rabbits. Low print-run zines strong on personality are always a welcome part of the fanzine scene; this is one.

MAGAZINE OF TOMORROW ≠7 and ADVENTURE IN THE 21st CENTURY ≠2 come together for 50p 28+12 A5 pages, from G. Bleathman,

the latter is primarily a Graeme Bassett-scripted, Graham Bleathman-drawn strip of a crucial period in the "future history" of Gerry Anderson's TV programmes, while MoT itself will be most of interest to Bem readers for its 7-page H.M.S. Conqueror strip, "Plan of Campaign", scripted of course by Martin Lock, and drawn by Graham. Parts are very nice indeed, though from my point of view not every picture of F1'ff is successful --but if you enjoy the crew's appearances in Bem, this is required reading. Otherwise, you'll be wondering what happened to episode 14! It also injects a little action into the series. Chapter six of "The 2nd British Empire", written by Glenn Dakin and drawn by Graham, is also to hand, plus an "Artist Spotlight" on Mike Noble and a critique of "Into Infinity" by Graeme, letters, more data on Gerry Anderson merchandise, and (by Graham) an article on the Society of Strip Illustration, which goes with the back cover, the work of McMahon, Bolland, Gibbons & O'Neill, portraying themselves (and Judge Nick Landau) as 2000AD characters, and taken from the cover of prog 16 of the SSI's newsletter. To be brief -- buy it!

Graham's also the cover artist on CYGNUS ALPHA ≠2 cover price 20p -- 30p by post, I guess--for 12 A5 pages from Paul West,

which features "A Personal View Of Science Fiction in the Cinema" by Denis Richardson, a 2½-page strip by editor Paul and Stephen Aggott, and the first part of an interview with comics dealer Derek Larkin. Unreduced type means quick reading --but if you want to encourage a new fanzine, this would be a good one to try.

CEREBRO ≠9 six issues for £3 from G.F. Willmetts,

has 30 A4 pages, while its fellow-traveller, part of the "X-Index" devoted to the three dead X-Men (not counting Jean Grey) runs to another 10 pages. There is a short interview with Len Wein, a piece on the Hellfire Club by Maureen James, fanzine reviews by Dick Domar, ten pages of letters, and lots more good stuff. X-fans would do well to invest £3, which includes a year's membership of The X-Men Fan Club --there's a good potential to enlarge fandom here, I look forward to seeing the club advertising in the new-look RAMPAGE. Without such a policy, the club is just a section of fandom concentrating on the X-Men; if it does bring in new blood, it's an asset.

Another specialized organisation is the Newspaper Strip Society, membership of which costs £3.75 to John Dakin.

The latest mailing is DAILY STRIPS ≠5, with in 20 A4 pages the Garth story "Night of the Knives" by Steve Dowling, John Allard & Jim Edgar from 1966, and also THE NEWSPAPER STRIP SOCIETY NEWSLETTER ≠2, which devotes half its 8 A4 pages to "Neil the Horse" strips by Arn Saba, and the other 4 pages to news, letters and general bits of interest. The next mailing will be a Romeo Brown story by Peter O'Donnell and Jim Holdaway, "Where There's a Will"; all good sexist fun, I'm sure, but I'm waiting for a Modesty Blaise issue!

STARLIGHT ≠1 should be out about now, with 24 A4 reduced litho pages for 35p + 15p postage & packing from Max O'Connor.

Max promises a Dave Hornsby cover, with inside articles, reviews, a strip, a dealers service guide (every 10,000 miles?), and all sorts of stuff, laid out with imagination and lots of letraset. I will report further next time.

And Gary Millidge has sent through some photocopies of AMON SPEK 4, as advertised on page 2. The cover, by Mark Cotgrove, looks good; he contributes some nice art inside too, as do Mike Taylor and Gary himself. From an unassuming start, this has become a reliable, consistent stripzine; should go far!

By the way, after the current issue of FANTASY TRADER (≠48), I'll no longer be reviewing fanzines there; that honour will go to Lovely Les Chester, so start sending him review copies

right away! The catch is, "Fanhunter" will also continue, under the present management, so keep on sending me requests for contributions, news, and suchlike for that column -- and fanzines and so on for this column...

COSMIC HEROES ≠2 18 A4 pages for a 30p uncrossed postal order, from Hon Fai Chan,

is a superhero-orientated stripzine; it stars Astrolite, an sf hero, and Electron, a super-powered crimebuster. What we have here is two ambitious 15-year-olds (Hon Fai Chan & John Williams) having a good time; you may well find that you do too.

Gerald Midgley advises that ALTERNATIVE HEADMASTER'S BULLETIN ≠3 will be around soon, with 44 or 48 A4 pages for 50p,

he has got copies of VANNA ≠1 (16 A4 pages) and ≠2 (52 A5 pages) available at 85p a go. The main drawback to the first two issues of this stripzine is that they're written in German; the artwork is a bit crude for my taste, but very useful for German scholars I'm sure.

FEATURE ZINE ≠5 20 A4 stencilled pages for 30p by post from Steve Jones,

contains its usual varied selection of artwork, articles and other bits; FZ's policy of printing all submissions is an excellent idea, and produces a good, readable mixture. If you want to start contributing to our weird 'n' wonderful hobby, this is a very useful zine to get involved with.

And the usual plug for FANDOM ≠12 has 36 A5 pages for an s.a.e. from Fandom Publications,

a cross between a comic dealer's catalogue and a fanzine. It's a valuable news source, and is ideal for the cover repro fanatic (I count over 60 here); there are fanzine reviews, free wants ads for people who order from the sales lists, which cover a lot of ground, from imports to paperbacks to underground comix. It could have been just another dealer's list; but Eddie Walsh has taken the trouble to make it a magazine. That's why I like FANDOM; besides, how many new fanzines reach a twelfth issue?

You'll have noticed the ad on page 32, beautifully drawn by Brian Bolland, for Comics Showcase; your roving reporter has investigated, and, finding it easily (next door to the Duchess Theatre), can reveal that it's a most useful addition to the Central London comics scene. Buy your new imports from Derek Stokes and his merry men at Dark They Were, or from Forbidden Planet, or at marts -- but, for the back issues, visit Paul Hudson and Perry Ross at Comics Showcase too! The prices seem fair, and the range was very wide, from golden age to last month. It deserves to do well. And they buy collections too, of course; all I want to know is why they named the shop after such a relatively obscure, short-lived fanzine...

Which is hardly the ideal way to lead into a preview of MASTERS OF INFINITY ≠5, which should be out now with 20 A4 pages for 35p from Mike Taylor.

There's a feature on Comicon '68 by eye-witness Phil Clarke (who combines Nostalgia and Comics, no doubt), one of the few original members of fandom UK still active; a 4-page lettercol; a 6-page strip written by Mike and drawn by Mark Farmer that's both thoughtful and stylish; an article on Howard Chaykin; plus Nige Edwards, Harry McAvinchey, and Dave Harwood, who drew the cover. I must ask Dave about one of his illoes on a letters page; the boy and girl portrayed obviously know something we don't, from the smiles on their faces! It should be another excellent issue.

Well, I put it off as long as possible, but OGRE ≠6 32 A5 pages for 25p by post from Colin Gould,

contains four pages of WEIRD TRASH, and nine pages of UGG-ROTTEN COMIX, about which Jonn Hay is saying nothing, pending a report from his lawyers. Add 7 pages of letters, stylish art, and some short review/articles, and you've a pretty good incentive to lash out £1 on a 4-issue subscription. Since OGRE won't be riding with GRAPHIC SENSE in future, now would be a very useful time to subscribe. -ED SALLIS

THUNDERMOLE

TERRY MOORE

HAVE ANOTHER

NO THANKS, I GOT SOME IRONING TO DO.

WHILST THUNDERMOLE ENJOYS THE PROCEEDS OF THE SILVER SAUSAGE MELTDOWN, GALACTAPUSSY IS BEAMING THOUGHT SIGNALS ACROSS THE UNIVERSE IN AN EFFORT TO TRACE THE SHINING HERALD.

FIND THE SILVERSAUSAGE

THE MESSAGE REACHES SARCOPHAGUS.

I HEAR AND OBEY!

IT LOOKS LIKE SARCOPHAGUS HAS GOT TO GO.

IT'LL TAKE HIM AGES WITH ALL THOSE BANDAGES ON.

WHAT HAVE I STEPPED IN?

THE COTTON CLAD CADAVER SEARCHES EVERYWHERE.....

UNTIL....

THE CLUES POINTED HERE.

HAH

THE GIFT WRAPPED GLADIATOR ENTERS THE HOME OF THUNDERMOLE

BLOODY HELL! A ST. JOHNS AMBULANCE VOLUNTEER.

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH THE SILVER SAUSAGE

ER.. NOTHING. HES GONE ON HIS HOLIDAYS, HE'LL BE BACK FRIDAY.

HE'D BETTER BE, OR YOU'RE GONNA NEED MORE BANDAGE THAN I.

BUT WHILST SARCOPHAGUS WATCHES T.V., THUNDERMOLE SERVES HIM DRUGGED TANA TEA.

THEN, IGNORING THE RISK OF DAMAGE TO HIS BEST CUP, THUNDERMOLE SNATCHES THE CIRCLET OF LIFE FROM THE BROW OF THE MUSTY MORON RENDERING HIM LIFELESS.

BUT APPROACHING THE EARTH HIGH ABOVE.....

MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS

THE MOST SPECTACULAR EVENT OF THE DECADE!

THE COMICS, FILM & FANTASY CONVENTION 1980

ROYAL HORTICULTURAL NEW HALL, LONDON SW1

SATURDAY 18th OCTOBER & SUNDAY 19th OCTOBER

TWO GREAT CONVENTIONS IN ONE!

This year, Marvel Comics, publishers of numerous successful comics *and* the film magazine **Starburst**, are stepping into the breach left by the absence of a Comic Convention and a Fantasy Film Convention to bring you the **Marvel Comics Film and Fantasy Convention 1980.**

MARVEL COMICS CONVENTION

Marvel Comics are the publishers of the world's most successful comic magazines. And over the weekend of 18th and 19th October you will have the chance to meet the creators of your favourite comics characters. There will be talks, demonstrations and panel discussions *plus* an opportunity to meet Marvel Characters *in person*. All this plus the presentation of the **Eagle Awards**, which are voted for by the comic fans of Britain and denote achievement in the comic field.

STARBURST FILM CONVENTION

Marvel Comics is also the publisher of **Starburst**, which concentrates on fantasy films and is one of Britain's most successful film magazines.

At the **Marvel Comics Film and Fantasy Convention, Starburst** will be playing host to many professionals from the worlds of cinema and television fantasy. There will be talks, panel discussions, a full programme of fantasy films and signings, culminating in the **Second Annual Starburst Fantasy Awards**, voted for by the readers of **Starburst** and denoting achievement in the field of fantasy.

GRAND CHARITY AUCTIONS

In collaboration with **Young Variety Clubs of Great Britain**, the **Marvel Comics Film and Fantasy Convention** will be presenting two Grand Charity Auctions of Comics and Film Memorabilia. *Plus* we will be arranging special charity signing sessions with special guest celebrities.

FANTASTIC FILM PROGRAMME

As well as a full programme of fantasy films running across the two days we are also planning to show trailers for upcoming fantasy movies and perhaps even the odd sneak preview of an as-yet-unseen fantasy film. Already we have, courtesy of MGM Pictures, a fabulous 16 minute film on the making of the new Ray Harryhausen/Charles Schneer film **Clash of the Titans,** based on the ancient Greek legends of Perseus and the Gorgon.

HUGE SALES ROOM

Many dealers in comics and film-related material will be in attendance at the **Marvel Comics Film and Fantasy Convention** offering, collectively, around quarter of a million comics books from the latest issues to the rarest collectors' items and thousands of film stills, posters and assorted movie memorabilia.

STAR ATTRACTIONS

★ GUESTS OF HONOUR ★

RAY HARRYHAUSEN

The creator of the special effects process *Dynamation* seen in the Sinbad series of movies plus the forthcoming *Clash of the Titans!*

ARCHIE GOODWIN

Writer of the Empire Strikes Back adaptation, editor of *Epic!*

SYD JORDAN

Creator of the classic *Jeff Hawke* series

★ ★ ★

PLUS

FROM THE WORLD OF BRITISH COMICS

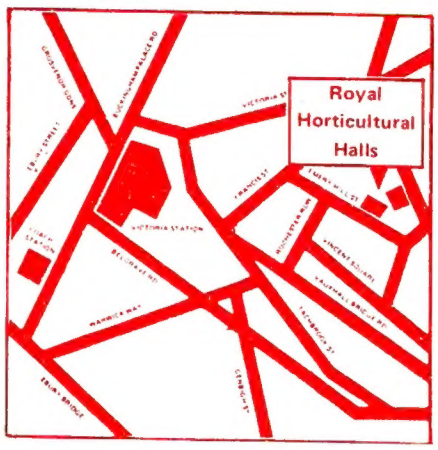
Brian Bolland, John Bolton (Night-Raven artist), Steve Dillon (Star Tigers artist), Dave Gibbons (Dr Who artist), Gary Leach and Paul Neary (editor of Marvel's weekly comics).

★ ★ ★

AND MANY OTHER GUESTS FROM THE WORLDS OF CINEMA AND TV FANTASY AND FROM THE WORLD OF COMICS

HOW TO GET THERE

The Royal Horticultural Halls are within easy reach of Victoria Station, which is served by the District, Circle and Victoria tube lines and the main British Rail Line.



And in addition The Marvel Shuttlebus service will be running between the Comic Mart at the Central Hall, Westminster (on 18th October) and the Marvel Comics Film and Fantasy Convention, free of charge to Convention attendees.

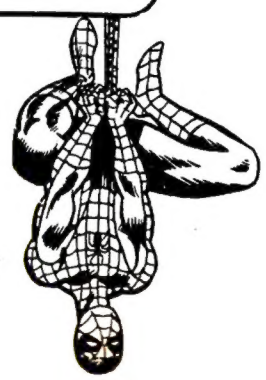
Saturday 18th October midday till late (doors open 10am). Sunday 19th October 10am till around 8pm.

ADMISSION CHARGES

Full Weekend: Sat & Sun
Adult: £5.00
Under 16: £3.00
Under 6: Free

ADMISSION CHARGES

Single Day: Sat or Sun
Adult: £3.00
Under 16: £2.00
Under 6: Free



also confirmed:

BILL SIENKIEWICZ